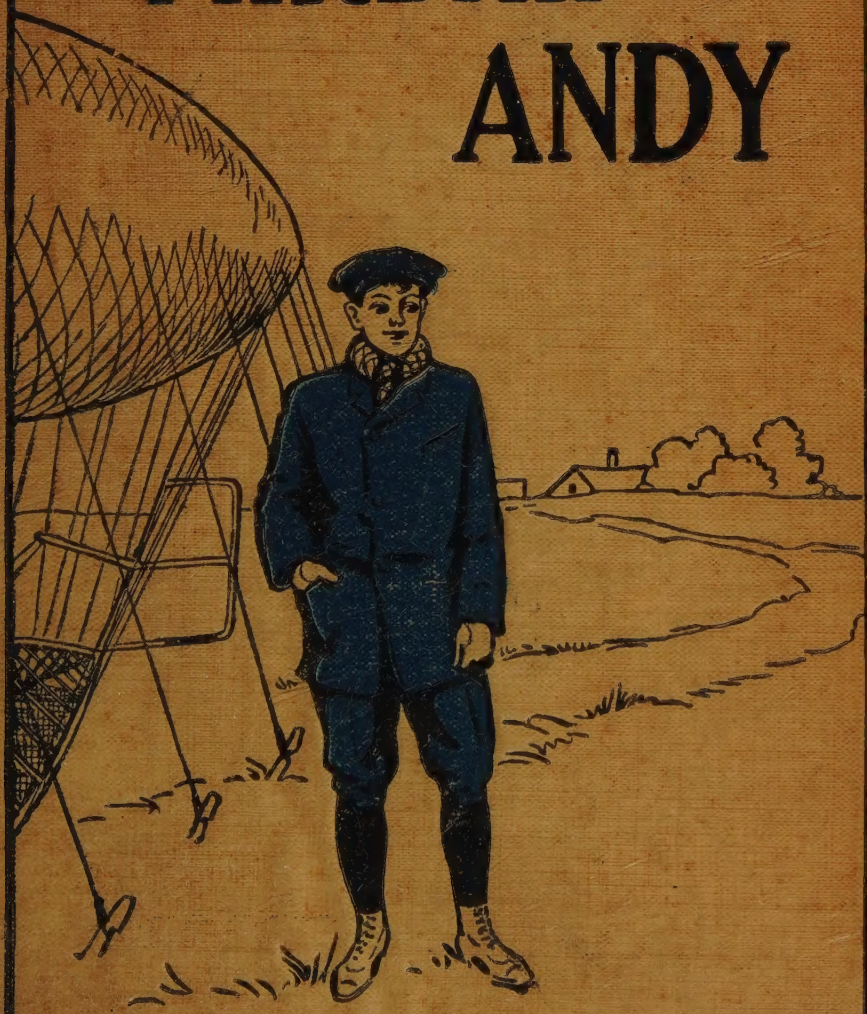
AIRSHIP ANDY



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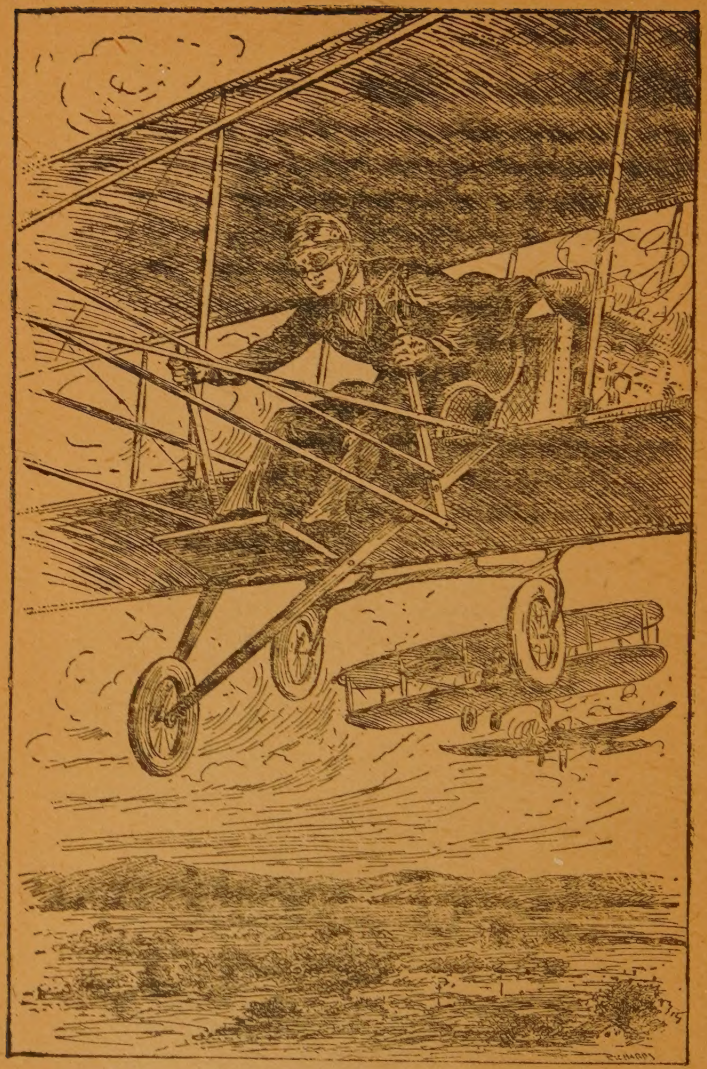

THE RACING STAR PASSED TWO OF THE CONTESTANTS

Airship Andy

Or

The Luck of a Brave Boy

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A FARM BOY," "BOB THE CASTAWAY," "COMRADES OF THE SADDLE," "TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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By FRANK V. WEBSTER

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume, 40 cents, postpaid

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AIRSHIP ANDY

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG CHAUFFEUR

"HAND over that money, Andy Nelson."

"Not on this occasion."

"It isn't yours."

"Who said it was?"

"It belongs to the business. If my father was here he'd make you give it up mighty quick. I represent him during his absence, don't I? Come, no fooling; I'll take charge of that cash."

"You won't, Gus Talbot. The man that lost that money was my customer, and it goes back to him and no one else."

Gus Talbot was the son of the owner of Talbot's Automobile Garage, at Princeville. He was a genuine chip of the old block, people said, except that he loafed while his father really worked. In respect to shrewd little business tricks, however, the son stood on a par with the father. He

had just demonstrated this to Andy Nelson, and was trying his usual tactics of bluff and bluster. These did not work with Andy, however, who was the soul of honor, and the insolent scion of the Talbot family now faced his father's hired boy highly offended and decidedly angry.

Andy Nelson was a poor lad. He was worse off than that, in fact, for he was homeless and friendless. He could not remember his parents. He had a faint recollection of knocking about the country until he was ten years of age with a man who called himself his half-brother. Then this same relative placed him in a cheap boarding school where Andy had to work for a part of his keep. About a year previous to the opening of our story, Dexter Nelson appeared at the school and told Andy he would have to shift entirely for himself.

He found Andy a place with an old farmer on the outskirts of Princeville. Andy was not cut out for hoeing and plowing. He was willing and energetic, however, and the old farmer liked him immensely, for Andy saved his oldest boy from drowning in the creek, and was kind and lovable to the farmer's several little children. But one day the old man told Andy plainly that he could not reconcile his conscience by spoiling a bright future for him, and explained why.

"If I was running a wagon-shop, lad," he said

enthusiastically, "I'd make you head foreman. Somehow, you've got machinery born in your blood, I think. The way you've pottered over that old rack of mine, shows how you like to dabble with tools. The way you fixed up that old washing-machine for marm proves that you know your business. Tell you, lad, it's a crying wrong to waste your time on the farm when you've got that busy head of yours running over with cogs, and screws, and wheels and such."

All this had led to Andy looking around for other employment. The old farmer was quite right—Andy's natural field was mechanics. He felt pretty happy the day he was accepted as the hired boy in Seth Talbot's garage.

That position was not secured without a great deal of fuss and bother on the part of Talbot, however. The latter was a hard task-master. He looked his prospective apprentice over as he would a new tool he was buying. He offered a mere beggarly pittance of wages, barely enough to keep body and soul together, and "lodgings," as he called it, on a broken-down cot in a dark, cramped lumber-room. Then he insisted on Andy getting somebody to "guarantee" him.

"I'll have no boy taking advantage of me," he declared; "learning the secrets of the trade, and bouncing off and leaving me in the lurch whenever it suits him. No sir-ree. If you come

with me, it's a contract for two years' service, or I don't want you. When I was a boy they 'prenticed a lad, and you knew where you could put your finger on him. It ought to be the law now."

Fortunately, Andy's half-brother happened to pass through the village about that time. He "guaranteed" Andy in some manner satisfactory to the garage proprietor, and Andy went to work at his new employment.

Talbot had formerly been in the hardware business. He seemed to think that this entitled him to know everything that appertained to iron and steel. When roller skating became a fad, he had sold out his business, built a big rink, and in a year was stranded high and dry. The bicycle fever caught him next, but he went into it just as everybody else was getting out of it. The result was another failure.

Now he had been in the automobile business for about six months. He had bought an old ramshackly paint-shop on the main street of the town, and had fixed it up so that it was quite presentable as a garage.

There were not many resident owners of automobiles in Princeville. Just at its outskirts, however, along the shore of a pretty lake, were the homes of some retired city folks. During the vacation months a good many people having ma-

chines summered at the town. Some of them stored their automobiles at the garage. Talbot claimed to do expert repairing, and as a good road ran through Princeville he managed to do some business with transient customers who came along.

Before he had been in the garage twenty-four hours, Andy was amazed and disgusted at the clumsy clap-trap repairing work that Talbot did. He half-mended breaks and leaks that would not last till a car reached its destination. He put in inferior parts, and on one occasion Andy saw his employer substitute an old tire for one almost new.

Andy tried to remedy all this. He was at home with tools, and inside of a week he was thoroughly familiar with every part of an automobile. He induced Talbot to send to the city for many important little adjuncts to ready repairing, and his employer soon realized that he had a treasure in his new assistant.

He did not, however, manifest it by any exhibition of liberality. In fact, as the days wore on Andy's tasks were piled up mountain high, and Talbot became a merciless tyrant in his bearing. Once when Andy earned a double fee by getting out of bed at midnight and hauling into town a car stuck in a mud-hole, he promised Andy a

raise in salary and a new suit the next week. This promise, however, Talbot at once proceeded to forget.

It was Andy who was responsible for nearly doubling the income of his hard task-master. He heard of a big second-hand tourist car in the city, holding some thirty people, and told Talbot about it. The latter bought it for a song, and every Saturday, and sometimes several days in the week, the car earned big money taking visitors sight-seeing around the lake or conveying villagers to the woods on picnic parties.

Later Andy struck a great bargain in two old cars that were offered for sale by a resident who was going to Europe. He influenced Talbot to advertise these for rent by the day or hour, and the garage began to thrive as a real money-making business.

This especial morning Andy had arisen as usual at five o'clock. He cooked his own meals on a little oil-stove in the lumber room behind the garage, and after a cup of coffee and some broiled ham and bread and butter, went to work cleaning up three machines that rented space.

It was a few minutes before six o'clock, and just after the morning train from the city had steamed into town and out of it again, when a well-dressed man, carrying a light overcoat over

one arm and a satchel, rushed through the open door of the garage.

"Hey!" he hailed. "They told me at the depot I could hire an automobile here."

"Yes, sir," replied Andy promptly.

"I want to cut across the country and catch the Macon train on the Central. There's just forty-five minutes to do it in."

"I can do it in twenty," announced Andy with confidence. "Jump in, sir."

In less than two minutes they were off, and the young chauffeur proved his agility and handiness with the machine in so rapid and clever a way, that his fare nodded and smiled his approval as they skimmed the smooth country road on a test run.

Andy made good his promise. It was barely half-past six when, with a honk-honk! to warn a clumsy teamster ahead of him, he ran the machine along the side of the depot platform at Macon.

"How much?" inquired his passenger, leaping out and reaching into his vest pocket.

"Our regular rate is two dollars an hour," explained Andy.

"There's five—never mind the change," interrupted the gentleman. "And here's a trifle for yourself for being wide-awake while most people are asleep."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Andy, overjoyed, but the man disappeared with a pleasant wave of his hand before the boy could protest against such unusual generosity.

Andy's eyes glowed with pleasure and his heart warmed up as he stowed the handsome five-dollar tip into his little purse containing a few silver pieces. He had never had so much money all his own at any time in his life. Once a tourist in settling a day's jaunt with Talbot in Andy's presence had added a two-dollar bill for his chauffeur, but this Talbot had immediately shoved into his money drawer without even a later reference to it.

Andy got back to the garage before seven o'clock. He whistled cheerily as he made a notation on the book of his fare and the collection, unlocked the desk, put the five dollars in the tin cash box, and relocked the desk.

Then he busied himself cleaning up the machine that had just made such a successful spin, for the roads were pretty dusty. As he pulled out the carpet of the tonneau to shake, something fell to the floor.

It was an old worn flat leather pocketbook. In a flash Andy guessed that his recent passenger had accidentally dropped it in the car.

He opened it in some excitement. It had a deep flap on one side. From this protruded the

edges of a dozen crisp new banknotes. Andy ran them over quickly.

"Two hundred dollars!" he exclaimed.

"What's that?" spoke a sharp, greedy voice at his ear.

It was Gus Talbot, his employer's son, who had just appeared on the scene. It was pretty early for him, for Gus paraded as the cashier of his father's business and stayed around the garage on an average of about three hours a day. Most of his time was spent at a village billiard room in the company of a bosom chum named Dale Billings.

Andy was somewhat taken off his balance by the unexpected appearance of his employer's son. It was really the shock of recognizing in the face of the newcomer the manners and avarice that he shared with his father. Almost instinctively Andy put the hand holding the pocketbook behind him. Then he said simply:

"I took a quick fare over to Macon to catch a train. He paid me five dollars. It's in the cash drawer."

"Oh, it is," drawled out Gus, and what about all the money I just caught you counting over?"

"It's a pocketbook containing two hundred dollars," replied Andy clearly, disdaining the slur and insult in the tones of his low-spirited challenger. "It was dropped by the man I just took

over in the machine. I've got to return it to him some way. I might get to the station here in time to notify him by telegraph before his train leaves Macon that I've found the pocketbook."

"Hold on," ordered Gus Talbot. "Hand over that money, Andy Nelson."

And then followed the conversation that opens this chapter, and Andy had barely announced that the pocketbook would go back to its owner and to no one else, when Gus made a jump at him.

"Give up that money, I say!" he yelled, and his big, eager fist clutched the pocketbook.

CHAPTER II

BREAKING AWAY

"LET go of that pocketbook!" ordered Gus Talbot angrily.

"When I do, tell me," retorted Andy.

The young chauffeur knew that once the money got into the hands of the Talbots, father or son, its return to its rightful owner would be extremely dubious. He had proven himself a match for Gus in more than one encounter in the past, and that was why Gus hated him. Andy reached out one hand not at all gently. He gave his opponent a push under the chin.

Gus Talbot went flat to the floor of the garage with a howl. He had not, however, let go his grip on the pocketbook. The result was that it had torn squarely in two. Andy directed a speedy glance at the half in his own hand. He was reassured, for he had retained the part holding the banknotes.

"You can keep what you have got," he advised

Gus, with a little triumphant laugh. "I'll put this where you won't get your paws on it."

With the words Andy ran through the front open doorway of the garage and down the street in the direction of the business section of the village.

Primarily anxiety to bestow the money in a safe place impelled his flight. Three other reasons, however, helped to influence him in leaving the field ingloriously.

In the first place, Gus Talbot was a wicked terror when he got mad. It was nothing for him to pick up a hatchet, a wrench or an iron bar and sail into an enemy when his cowardly fists failed him. Andy might have remained to give the mean craven a further lesson, but chancing to glance through a side window he saw the chosen crony of Gus approaching. Dale Billings was the bully of the town. He had left Andy severely alone after tackling him once. With Gus and Dale both against him, however, Andy decided that there would be little show of retaining possession of the money.

The third reason was more potent and animating than any of the others. Just crossing lots from his home and headed for the garage direct was its proprietor. If Andy had had any confidence in the sense of justice and rectitude of Talbot he would have stood his ground. He had

none, and therefore made a rash resolve. It was open defiance of his harsh employer, and there would be a frightful row later on, but Andy's mind was made up. He had reached the next corner and flashed around it and out of sight before Gus Talbot had gained his feet.

Fifteen minutes later Andy Nelson reappeared at the end of a secluded street near the edge of the village. He was slightly breathless, and looked excited, and glanced back of him keenly before he sat down on a tree stump to rest and think.

"I've done my duty," he murmured; "but it will make things so hot at the garage I don't think I'll go back there."

Andy indulged in a spell of deep reflection. For some time he had realized that he was giving his best energies to a man who did not appreciate them. His work had grown harder and harder. Whenever a complaint came in about imperfect work, due to the sloppy methods of Talbot, the garage owner made Andy shoulder all the blame.

"He talks about a two-years' contract, and tries to scare me about what the law will do to me if I leave him," soliloquized Andy. "Has he kept his part of the bargain? Did he give me the increase in pay and the suit of clothes he promised? No, he didn't. I've got something in me, but it will kill it all out to stay in this

place. I've got five dollars as a nest-egg, and I'm going to start out on my own hook."

Andy was fully determined on his course. Perhaps if the incident of the morning had not come up, he might have delayed his decision. He knew very well, however, that if he went back to the garage Talbot would raise a big row, and he would also get hold of the two hundred dollars if it were possible for him to do so. Some day Andy feared the Talbots would play one too many of their uncertain tricks and involve him in an imputation of dishonesty.

"It's straight ahead, and never turn back," declared Andy decisively, and started down the road.

"Hold on there, young man!" challenged a voice that gave Andy a thrill.

Running around the curve in the road Andy had just traversed, red-faced and flustered, Seth Talbot came bearing down upon him.

Andy might have halted, but the sight of Gus Talbot and Dale Billings bringing up the rear armed with heavy sticks so entirely suggested an onslaught of force that he changed his mind. He paid no attention whatever to the furious shouts and direful threats of Talbot.

Andy put ahead at renewed speed. At a second turn in the highway a man was raking up hay, and he suspended his work and stared at

the fugitive and his pursuers, as Talbot roared out:

"Stop him, Jones—he's a runaway and a thief!"

Farmer Jones was not spry enough to shorten the circuit Andy made, but he thrust out the rake to its full length. Andy's foot caught in its tines, dragged, tripped, and the boy went flat to the ground.

"I've got him!" hailed Jones, promptly pouncing down upon him.

"Hold him!" panted Talbot, rushing to the spot, and his hard, knotty fingers got an iron clutch on Andy's coat collar and jerked him to his feet.

"What's the trouble, neighbor?" projected the farmer curiously.

"A thief isn't the matter!" shot out Andy hotly, recalling the words of his employer.

"You'll have to prove that," blustered Talbot. "If you're innocent, what are you running for?"

"I was running away from you," admitted Andy boldly, "because I want to be honest and decent."

"What's that?" roared the irate Talbot. "Do you hear him, Jones? He admits he was going to break his contract with me. Well, the law will look to that, you ungrateful young cub!"

"Law! contract!" cried Andy scornfully, fully roused up and fearless now. "Have you kept

your contract with me? You don't want me, you want that two hundred dollars——"

"Shut up! Shut up!" yelled Talbot, and he muzzled Andy with one hand and dragged him away from the spot. Farmer Jones grinned after them, and he shrugged his shoulders grimly as he noticed Gus Talbot and Dale Billings halted down the road, as if averse to coming any nearer.

"'Pears to me you're having a good deal of trouble with your boys, Talbot," chuckled Jones. "That son of yours got a few cracks from my cane last evening when he was helping himself to some of my honey among the hives."

Once out of hearing of the farmer, Gus Talbot edged up to his father.

"Has he got the money?" he inquired eagerly. "Make him tell, father, search him."

"I'll attend to all that," retorted the elder Talbot gruffly. "Here, you two fall behind. There's no need of attracting attention with a regular procession."

Talbot did not relax his hold of the prisoner until they had reached the garage. He roughly threw Andy into the lumber room. Then, panting and irritated from his unusual exertions, he planted himself in the doorway. Gus and Dale hovered about, anxious to learn the outcome of the row.

"Now then, Andy Nelson," commenced the

garage owner, "I've just a few questions to ask you, and you'll answer them quick and right, or it will be the worse for you."

"It has certainly never been the best for me around here," declared Andy bitterly, "but I'll tell the truth, as I always do."

"Did you find a pocketbook with some money in it in one of my cars?"

"I did," admitted Andy—"two hundred dollars. It belonged to my fare, who lost it, and it's going back to him."

"Hand it over."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?" demanded Talbot stormily.

"Because I haven't got it."

"Who has?"

"Mr. Dawson, the banker. I took it to him when I left the garage."

"Oh, you did?" muttered Seth Talbot, looking baffled and furious.

"Yes, sir. I told him that it was lost money, explained the circumstances, and that if a certain Mr. Robert Webb called or telegraphed for it, to let him have it."

"Is that the name of the man you took over to Macon?"

"That is the name written in red ink on the flap of the pocketbook," and Andy drew out the former receptacle of the banknotes. "'Robert

Webb, Springfield.' I shall write to him at Springfield and tell him where the money is."

Seth Talbot fairly glared at Andy. He got up and wriggled and hemmed and hawed, and sat down again.

"Young man," he observed in as steady tone of voice as he could command, "you've shown a sight of presumption in taking it on yourself to lay out my business system. Here you've gone and implied that I was not fit to be trusted."

Andy was silent.

"I won't have it; no, I won't have it!" shouted the garage-keeper. "It's an imputation on my honor! I'll give you just one chance to redeem yourself. You go back to the bank and tell Mr. Dawson that we've got on the direct track of the owner of the money, and bring it back here."

"That would be a lie," said Andy.

"Don't we know where he is?"

"In a general way, but so does the bank. It would be a cheat, too, for I don't believe you want to get the money back to its rightful owner any more than you wanted to pay me the tip that passenger left here for me last week."

Andy had been too bold. Talbot rose up, towering with rage. He sprang upon Andy, and threw him upon the cot, holding him there by sheer brute strength.

"Here, you Gus—Dale!" he shouted. "Off

with his hat and shoes. And his coat—no, let me look that over first. Aha!"

Gus Talbot considered it high sport to assail a defenceless and outnumbered adversary. He and Dale snatched off cap and shoes without gentleness or ceremony. Talbot had got hold of Andy's little purse and had brought to light the five dollars so carefully folded and stowed away there.

"Honest? Ha, ha! Decent? Ho, ho!" railed the old wretch. "Where did you get this five dollars without stealing it?"

"Bet he got ten dollars for the run to Macon and held back half of it," chimed in Gus.

"My fare gave it to me for making good time," explained Andy. "If you don't believe it, write to him."

"Yah!" jibed Talbot; "tell that to the marines!"

He kicked Andy's shoes and cap under a bench in the outer room and threw his coat up among a lot of old rubbish on a platform under the roof.

"Get the strongest padlock and hasp in the place," he ordered his son, "and secure that door. As to you, young man," he continued to Andy, "I'll give you till night to make up your mind to get back that money."

"I never will," declared Andy positively.

"Boy," said Seth Talbot, fixing his eye on Andy in a way that made his blood chill, "you'll do it, as I say, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

CHAPTER III

RUNAWAY AND ROVER

THE door of the lumber room was slammed shut on Andy and strongly locked, and the lad resigned himself to the situation. The Talbots, father and son, aided by brutal Dale Billings, had handled him pretty roughly, and he was content to lie on the cot and prepare for what was coming next.

"They've pretty nearly stripped me, and they've got all my money," reflected Andy. "I wish now I had dropped a postal card to Mr. Robert Webb at Springfield. I'll do it, though, the first thing, when I get out of this fix."

Andy was bound to get out of it in some way. It would be rashness complete to try it right on the spur of the moment. However, he had till night to think things over, and the youth felt pretty positive that long before then he would hit upon some plan of escape.

In a little while Andy got up and took stock of his surroundings. The partition that shut in

the lumber room was made of common boards. With a good-sized sledge, Andy could batter it to pieces, but he had no tools, and glancing through a crack he saw Talbot and his son in the little front office ready to pounce on him at a minute's notice.

There was a long narrow box lying up against the inside surface of the partition boards. Andy had used this to hold his little kit of kitchen utensils. He removed these now, and lifted the box on end under the only outside aperture the lumber room presented. This was a little window, way up near the ceiling. When Andy reached this small, square hole, cut through a board, he discerned that he could never hope to creep through it.

Glancing down into the rear yard he made out Dale Billings, seated on a saw-horse, aimlessly whittling at a stick, and he decided that the ally of the Talbots was on guard there to watch out for any attempted escape in that direction.

However, when Andy had done a little more looking around in his prison-room, he made quite an encouraging discovery. Where the box had stood originally there was a broad, loose board. Dampness had weakened one end, and a touch pulled it away from the nails that held it. With one or two vigorous pulls, Andy saw he might rip the board out of place its entire length. This,

however, would make a great noise, would arouse his captors, and he would have to run the gantlet the whole reach of the garage space.

"It's my only show, though," decided Andy, "and I'll keep it in mind for later on."

Towards noon Andy made a meal of some scraps of food he found in his little larder. It was not a very satisfying meal, for his stock of provisions had run low that morning and he had intended replenishing it during the day.

About two o'clock in the afternoon Andy fancied he saw his chance for making a break for liberty. Talbot was in the office. There was only one automobile in the garage. This was a car that the proprietor's son had just backed in. Andy could figure it out that Gus had just returned from a trip. He leaped out of the machine, simply throwing out the power clutch, with the engine still in motion, as if intending to at once start off again.

Gus ran to the office, and through the crack in the partition Andy saw him scan the open page of the daily order book. Our hero determined on a bold move. He leaned down in the corner of the lumber room and seized the end of the loose plank at the bottom of the partition with both hands, and gave it a pull with all his strength.

R—r—rip—bang!

Andy went backwards with a slam. The board

had broken off at the nail-heads of the first rafter with a deafening crack. He dropped the fragment and dove through the aperture disclosed to him. He could hear startled conversation in the office, but it was no time to stop for obstacles now. Andy came to his feet in the garage room, made a superb spring, cleared the hood of the automobile, and, after a scramble, landed in the driver's seat.

With a swoop of his right hand, Andy grasped the lever, his left clutching the wheel. The car shot for the door in a flash. Gus Talbot had run out of the office. He saw the machine coming, and who manned it. Andy noticed him poising for a spring, snatched up the dust robe in the seat by his side, gave it a whirl, and forged ahead.

The robe wound around the face and shoulders of Gus, sending him staggering back, discomfited. Andy circled into the street away from town, turned down the south turnpike, and breathed the air of freedom with rapture.

"All I want is a safe start. I can't afford to leave the record behind me that I stole a machine," he reflected. "It's bad enough as it is now, with all the lies Talbot will tell. She's gone stale!"

The automobile wheezed down to an abrupt halt. It was just as it came to a curve near the Jones farm, and almost at the identical spot where

Andy had been captured that morning. He cast a quick glance behind. No one was as yet visible in pursuit, and there was no other machine in the garage. One was handy not a square away from it, however. Andy had noticed a physician's car there as he sped along. The Talbots would not hesitate to impress it into service. At any rate, they would start some pursuit at once.

Andy guessed that some of Gus Talbot's careless tactics had put the magneto or carburetor out of commission. It would take fully five minutes to adjust things in running order. No one was in view ahead. There were all kinds of opportunities to hide before an enemy came upon the scene.

Right at the side of the road was the hayfield of the Jones farm. Andy leaped a ditch and started to get to the thin line of scrub oak beyond which lay the creek. He passed three haystacks and they now pretty well shut him out from the road. As he was passing the fourth one, he stumbled, hopped about on one foot with a sharp cry of pain, and dropped down in the stubble.

Andy had tripped over a scythe blade which the stubble had hidden from his view. His ankle had struck the back of the blade, then his foot had turned and met the edge of the scythe. A long, jagged gash, which began to bleed profusely, was the result. Andy struggled to his feet and

leaned up against the side of the haystack in some dismay. He measured the distance to the brush with his eye.

"I've got to make it if I want to be safe," the boy decided, wincing with the pain of his injured foot, but resolute to grin and bear it till he had the leisure to attend to it.

A shout halted Andy. It came from the direction of the barn, and he fancied it was Farmer Jones giving orders to some of his men. Half decided to make a run of it anyway, he made a sudden plunge into the haystack and nestled there.

A clatter had come from the direction of the roadway he had just left. Glancing in that direction, through a break in the trees, Andy had caught a flashing view of Gus Talbot, bareheaded and excited, in a light wagon, and lashing the horse attached to it furiously.

Andy drew farther back in among the hay, nesting himself out a comfortable burrow. He ventured to part the hay as he heard a great commotion in the direction of the road. He could trace the arrival of Gus, his discovery of the stalled automobile, and the flocking of Farmer Jones and his men to the spot.

Then in a little while the garage-keeper and Dale Billings arrived in another machine. Some arrangement was made to take the various vehicles back to the village. Then Seth Talbot, his

son, and two of the farm hands scattered over the field, making for the brush. They went in every direction. A vigorous hunt was on, and Andy realized that it would be wise for him to keep close to his present cover for some time to come.

His foot was bleeding badly, and he paid what attention to it he could. He removed his stockings, bound up the wound with a handkerchief, and drew both stockings over the injured member.

It was pretty irksome passing the time in his enforced prison, and finally Andy went to sleep. It was late dusk when he woke up. He parted the hay, and took as good a look around as he could. No one was in sight, apparently, but he had no idea of venturing forth for some hours to come.

"I'm going to leave Princeville," he ruminated, "but I can't go around the world hatless, coatless and barefooted. I don't dare venture back to the garage for any of my belongings. That place will probably be watched all the time for my return. Talbot, too, has probably telephoned his 'stop thief' description of me everywhere. It's the river route or nothing, if I expect to get safely away from this district. Before I go, though, I'm going to see Mr. Dawson."

This was the gentleman to whom Andy had entrusted the two hundred dollars. Andy had a very favorable opinion of him. The village

banker was a great friend of the boys of the town. He had started them in a club, had donated a library, and Andy had attended two of his moving-picture lectures. After the last one, Mr. Dawson had taken occasion to pass a pleasant word with Andy, commending his attention to the lecture. When Andy had taken the two hundred dollars to him that morning, the banker had placed his hand on his shoulder, with the remark: "You are a good, honest boy, Nelson, and I want to see you later."

"I'll wait until about nine o'clock," planned Andy, "when most of the town is asleep, and go to Mr. Dawson's house. There's a lecture at the club to-night, I know, and he won't get home till after ten. I'll hide in the garden and catch him before he goes into the house. I'll tell him my story, and ask him to lend me enough to get some shoes and the other things I need. I know he'll do it, for he's an honest, good-hearted man."

This prospect made Andy light of heart as time wore on. It must have been fully half-past eight when he began to stir about, preparatory to leaving his hiding-place. He moved his injured foot carefully. It was quite sore and stiff, but he planned how he would line the timber townwards and stop at a spring and bathe and dress it again. He mapped out a long and obscure circuit of the

village to reach the home of the banker unobserved.

Andy was just about to emerge from the haystack when the disjointed murmur of conversation was borne to his ears. He drew back, but peered through the hay as best he could. It was bright moonlight. Just dodging from one haystack to another at a little distance, Andy made out Gus Talbot and Dale Billings.

"Come on," he heard the latter say—"now's our chance."

"They must be still looking for me," he told himself.

There was no further view nor indication of the proximity of the twain during the next hour, but caution caused Andy to defer his intended visit to the banker.

"The coast seems all clear now," he told himself at last, and Andy crept out of the haystack, but promptly crept back again.

Of a sudden a great echoing shout disturbed the silence of the night. Some one in the vicinity of the farmhouse yelled out wildly:

"Fire!"

CHAPTER IV

DOWN THE RIVER

"FIRE—fire!"

The cry that had rung out so startlingly was repeated many times. Andy could trace a growing commotion. His burrow in the haystack faced away from the buildings of the Jones farm, but in a minute or two a great glare was visible even through his hay shield.

Andy did not dare to venture out from his hiding-place. From increasing shouts and an uproar, he could understand that the Jones household, and then the families of neighbors were thronging to the fire. Some of these latter, making a short cut from the road, passed directly by the haystack in which he was hiding.

"It's the barn," spoke a voice.

"That's what it is, and blazing for good," was responded excitedly, and the breathless runners hurried on.

Andy made up his mind that he would have to stay where he was for some time to come, if he

expected to avoid capture. Very soon people from the village came trooping to the scene. He could trace the shouts of the bucket brigade. He heard one or two automobiles come down the road. The glare grew brighter and the crowd bigger. Soon, however, the stubble-field began to get shadowed again, he noticed.

It must have taken the barn an hour to burn up. People began to repass the haystacks on their return trips. Andy caught many fragments of conversation. He heard a man remark:

"They managed to save the livestock."

"Yes," was responded; "but Jones says a couple of thousand dollars won't cover his loss."

"What caused it, anyhow?"

"It was a mystery to Jones, he says, until Talbot came along. They seemed to fix up a theory betwixt them."

"What was that?"

"Why, Jones was sort of hot and bitter about some boys who have bothered him a lot of late. He walloped one or two of them. Young Gus Talbot was among them. Jones was hinting around about the fire being set for revenge, when Talbot spoke up and reminded him that he had headed off that runaway apprentice of Talbot's this morning."

"Oh, the boy they're looking for—Andy?"

"Yes, Andy Nelson. He's the one that set the

fire, Talbot declares, and Jones believes it, and they're going to start a big hunt for him. Talbot says he's beat him out of some money, and Jones says he's just hung around before leaving for good to get even with him for stopping him from getting away from Talbot." And, so speaking, the men passed on.

"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish!" ruminated Andy. "What next, I wonder?"

The refugee felt pretty serious as he realized the awkward and even perilous situation he was in. As he recalled the fact that Gus and Dale Billings had crossed over the field an hour before the fire broke out, he was pretty clear in his own mind as to the identity of the firebugs.

"It's no use of thinking about seeing Mr Dawson now," decided Andy. "It's too late in the evening, and too many people will be looking for me. There's so much piling up against me, that maybe Mr Dawson wouldn't believe a word I say. No, it's a plain case. They haven't any use for me in Princeville, and the sooner I get out of the town and stay out of it, the better for me."

Andy's foot was in no condition for a long tramp. He realized this as he stretched it out and tested his weight upon it. He was not seriously crippled, but he was in no shape to run a race or kick a football.

"It's going to be no easy trick getting safely away from Princeville and out of the district," the boy told himself. "I'll wait until about midnight, then I'll make for the river. There's boats going and coming as far as the lake, and I may get a lift as far as the city. I can lose myself there, or branch out for new territory."

Everything was still, and not a sign of life visible anywhere on the landscape, when Andy at length ventured to leave his hiding-place. There was a smell of burned wood in the air, and some smoke showed at the spot where the barn had stood, but the town and the farmer's household seemed to have gone to bed.

No one appeared to see or follow him while crossing the stubble field, but Andy felt a good deal easier in mind as he gained the cover of the brush.

The boy was entirely at home here—along the river as well. He had found little time for recreation while working for Talbot, but whenever a spare hour had come along he had made for the woods and the creek as a natural playground. Now he went from thicket to thicket with a sense of freedom. He knew a score of good hiding-places, if he should be suddenly surprised.

Andy looked up and down the creek when he reached it. He hoped to locate some barge ready

to go down the river with some piles of tan bark, or a freight boat returning from the summer camps along the lake. Nothing was moving on the stream, however, and no water craft in view.

"I'll get below the bridge. Then I'll be safe to wait until daylight. Something is bound to come along by that time," he reflected.

Andy reached and passed the bridge about a mile below Princeville. There was no other bridge for ten miles, and if he had to foot it on his journey to the city, he would be out of the way of traversed roads. He walked on for about half a mile and was selecting a sheltered spot to rest in, directly on the stream, when, a few yards distant, he noticed a light scow near shore.

Andy proceeded towards this. It resembled many craft of its class used by farmers to carry grain and livestock to market. Andy noticed that it was unloaded and poles stowed amidships. He stepped aboard. No one was in charge of it.

"I might find some of the abandoned old skiffs or rafts the boys play with, if I search pretty hard," soliloquized Andy, stepping ashore again.

"Hey!"

Andy was startled. Tracing the source of the short, quick hail, he discovered a man seated on a boulder near a big hazel bush. Andy was startled a little, and slowly approached his challenger.

The man who had spoken to him sat like a statue. He was a pale-faced individual, with very large bright eyes, and his face was covered with a heavy black beard. A cape that almost covered him hung from his shoulders, completely hiding his hands. He looked Andy over keenly.

"Did you call me, mister?" inquired Andy.

"Yes, I did," responded the man. "I was wondering what you were doing, lurking around here at this unearthly hour of the night."

Andy mentally decided that it was quite as much a puzzle to him what the stranger was doing, sitting muffled up at two o'clock in the morning in this lonely place.

"I was looking for a boat to take me down stream," explained Andy.

"Are you willing to work for a lift?" inquired the man.

"I should say so," replied Andy emphatically.

"Do you know how to manage a craft like this one here?"

"Oh, that's no trick at all," said Andy. "The river is clear, and there's nothing to run into, and all you have to do is to pole along in midstream."

"Where do you want to get to?"

"The city."

"I'm not going that far. I'll tell you what I'll

do, though," said the stranger—"you pole me down to Swan Cove——"

"That's about fifteen miles."

"Yes. You take me that far, and I'll make it worth your while."

"It's a bargain, and I'm delighted!" exclaimed Andy with spirit.

"All right," said the man; "get to work."

He never got up from his seat while Andy cast free the shore hawser. When everything was ready he stepped aboard rather clumsily. Andy thought it very strange that the man never offered to help him the least bit. His passenger seated himself in the stern of the barge, the cloak still closely enveloping his form, his hands never coming into sight.

It was welcome work for Andy, propelling the boat. It took his mind off his troubles, and every push of the pole and the current took him away from the people who had injured his good reputation and were bent on robbing him of his liberty.

The grim, silent man at the stern of the craft was a puzzle to Andy. He never spoke nor stirred. Our hero wondered why he kept so closely covered up and in what line of transportation he used the barge.

They had proceeded about two miles with smooth sailing when there was a sudden bump. The boat had struck a snag.

"Gracious!" ejaculated Andy, sent sprawling flat on the deck.

The contact had lifted the stranger from his seat. He was knocked to one side. Andy, scrambling to his feet, was tremendously startled as his glance swept his passenger.

The man struggled to his feet with clumsiness. He was hasty, almost suspicious in his movements. The cloak had flown wide open, and now he was swaying his arms around in a strange way, trying to cover them up.

"Why!" said the youth to himself, with a sharp gasp, "the man is handcuffed!"

CHAPTER V

TRAMPING IT

"GRACIOUS!" said Andy, and made a jump clear into the water.

The pole had swung out of his hands when the barge struck the snag. He got wet through recovering it, but that did nŏt matter much, for he had little clothing on.

By the time he had got back on deck his mysterious passenger had resumed his old position. The cloak again completely enveloped the upper portion of his body and his hands were out of sight. Andy acted as though his momentary glance had not taken in the sight of the handcuffs.

"Sorry, mister, we struck that snag, but the moon's going down and a fog coming up, and I couldn't help it."

"Don't mind that," was all that the man at the stern vouchsafed in reply.

The moon had gone down as Andy had said, but enough of its radiance had fallen on the squirming figure of the stranger a few minutes

previous to show the cold, bright glint of the pair of manacles. Andy was sure that the man's wrists were tightly handcuffed. A sort of a chill shudder ran over him as he thought of it.

"An escaped convict?" Andy asked himself. "Maybe. That's bad. I don't want to be caught in such company, the fix I'm in."

The thought made the passenger suddenly repellant to Andy. He had an idea of running close to the shore and making off.

"No, I won't do it," he decided, after a moment's reflection, "I'm only guessing about all this. He's not got a bad face. It's rather a wild and worried one. I'm a runaway myself, and I've got a good reason for being so. Maybe this man has, too."

Andy applied himself to his work with renewed vigor. It must have been about five o'clock in the morning when the stranger directed him to navigate up a feeder to the stream, which, a few rods beyond, ran into a swamp pond, which Andy knew to be Swan Cove.

A few pushes of the pole drove the craft up on a muddy slant. It was getting light in the east now. Andy came up to the man with the question:

"Is this where you land, mister?"

"Yes," nodded his passenger. "Come here."

Andy drew closer to the speaker.

"I told you I'd make it worth your while to pole me down the river," he said.

"Oh, that's all right."

"I haven't got any money, but I want to pay you as I promised you. Take that."

"What, mister?" and then Andy learned what the man meant. The latter hunched one shoulder towards the timber on which he sat, and there lay a small open-faced silver watch.

Andy wondered how he had managed to get it out of his pocket, but he had, and there it lay.

"It's worth about eight dollars," explained the man. "You can probably get four for it. Anyhow, you can trade it off for some shoes and clothes, which you seem to need pretty badly."

"Yes, I do, for a fact," admitted Andy, with a slight laugh. "But see here, mister, I don't want your watch. I couldn't ask any pay, for I wanted to come down the creek myself, and I was just waiting to find the chance to work my way when you came along."

"You'll take the watch," insisted the stranger in a decided tone, "so say no more about it, and put it in your pocket. There's only one thing, youngster—I want to ask a favor of you."

"Yes, sir."

"Forget you ever saw me."

"That will be hard to do, but I will try."

"What's your name?"

"Andy Nelson."

"I'll remember that," said the man, repeating it over twice to himself. "You'll see me again some time, Andy Nelson, even if I have to hunt you up. You've done me a big favor. You said you were headed for the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you'll follow back to the river, and cut south a mile, you'll come to a road running in that direction."

"Aren't you going to use the barge any farther, mister?" inquired Andy.

"No, and perhaps you had better not, either," answered the man, with a short nervous laugh.

"Well, this is a queer go!" ruminated Andy, as the man started inland and was soon lost to view. "I wonder who he is? Probably on his way to some friends where he can get rid of those handcuffs. Now, what for myself?"

Andy thought things out in a rational way, and was soon started on the tramp. His prospective destination was the city. It was a large place, with many opportunities for work, he concluded. He would be lost from his pursuers in a big city like that, he theorized.

Andy soon located the road his late passenger had indicated. He looked at the watch a good many times. It was a plain but substantial timepiece. It was the first watch Andy had ever

owned, and he took great pleasure in its possession.

"I don't think I'll part with it," he said, as he tramped along. "I feel certain I can pick up enough odd jobs on my way to the city to earn what clothing I need and enough to eat."

It was about seven o'clock when Andy, after a steep hill climb, neared a fence and lay down to rest in the shade and shelter of a big straw stack. He was asleep before he knew it.

"What in the world is that!" he shouted, springing up, wide awake, as a hissing, flapping, cackling hubbub filled the air, mingled with shouts of impatience, excitement and despair.

"Head 'em off—drive 'em in! Shoo—shoo!" bellowed out somebody in the direction of the road.

"Geese!" ejaculated Andy—"geese, till you can't rest or count them! Where did they ever come from? Hi, get away!"

As Andy stepped out of range of the straw stack, he faced a remarkable situation. The field he was in covered about two acres. It was enclosed with a woven-wire fence, and had a gate. Through this, from the road, a perspiring man was driving geese, aided by a boy armed with a long switch.

Andy had never seen such a flock of geese before. He estimated them by the hundreds. Nor

had he ever viewed such a battered up, dust-covered, crippled flock. Many, after getting beyond the gate, squatted down as if exhausted. Others fell over on their sides, as if they were dying. Many of them had torn and bleeding feet, and limped and hobbled in evident distress.

The man and the boy had to head off stupid and wayward groups of the fowls to get them within the enclosure. Then when they had closed the gate, they went back down the road. Andy gazed wonderingly after them. For half a mile down the hill there were specks of fluttering and lifeless white. He made them out to be fowls fallen by the wayside.

The man and boy began to collect these, two at a time, bringing them to the enclosure, and dropping them over the fence. It was a tiresome, and seemed an endless task. Andy climbed the fence and joined them.

"Hello!" hailed the man, looking a little flustered; "do you belong around here?"

"No; I don't," replied Andy.

"I don't suppose any one will object to my penning in those fowls until I find some way of getting them in trim to go on."

"They can't do much harm," suggested Andy. "I say, I'll help you gather up the stray ones."

"I wish you would," responded the man, with a sound half-way between a sigh and a groan.

"I am nigh distracted with the antics of those fowls. We had eight hundred and fifty when we started. We've lost nigh on to a hundred in two days."

"What's the trouble? Do they stray off?" inquired Andy, getting quite interested.

"No; not many of them. The trouble is traveling. I was foolish to ever dream I could drive up to nearly one thousand geese across country sixty miles. The worst thing has been where we have hit the hill roads and the highways they're ballasting with crushed stone. The geese get their feet so cut they can't walk. If we try the side of the roads, then we run into ditches, or the fowls get under farm fences, and then it's trouble and a chase. I say, lad," continued the man, with a glance at Andy's bandaged foot, "you don't look any too able to get about yourself."

"Oh, that isn't worth thinking of," declared Andy. "I'll be glad to help."

He quite cheered up the owner of the geese by his willingness and activity. In half an hour's time they had all the disabled stray fowls in the enclosure. Some dead ones were left where they had fallen by the wayside.

"I reckon the old nag is rested enough to climb up the rest of the hill now," spoke the man to his companion, who was his son. "Fetch Dobbin

along, Silas, and we'll feed the fowls and get a snack ourselves."

Andy curiously regarded the poor crowbait of a horse soon driven into view attached to a ramshackly wagon. The horse was put to the grass near the enclosure, and two bags of grain unearthed from a box under the seat of the wagon and fed to the penned-in geese.

Next Silas produced a small oil-stove, a coffeepot and some packages, and, seated on the grass, Andy partook of a coarse but substantial breakfast with his new friends.

"There's a town a little ahead, I understand," spoke the man.

"Yes," nodded Andy; "Afton."

"Then we've got twenty miles to go yet," sighed the man. "I don't know how we'll ever make it."

Andy gathered from what the man said that he and his family had gone into the speculation of raising geese that season. The nearest railroad to his farm was twenty miles distant. His market was Wade, sixty miles away. He had decided to drive the geese to destination. Two-thirds of the journey accomplished, a long list of disasters spread out behind, and a dubious prospect ahead.

"It would cost me fifty dollars to wagon what's left to the nearest railroad station, and as much more for freight," said the man gloomily.

Andy looked speculative. In his mechanical work his inventive turn of mind always caused him to put on his thinking-cap when he faced an obstacle.

"I've got an idea," declared Andy brightly. "Say, mister, suppose I figure out a way to get your geese the rest of the way to market quite safely and comfortably, and help drive them the balance of the distance, what will you do for me?"

"Eh?" ejaculated the man eagerly. "Why, I'd —I'd do almost anything you ask, youngster."

"Is it worth a pair of shoes, and a new cap and coat?" asked Andy.

"Yes; a whole suit," said the man emphatically, "and two good dollars a day on top of it."

"It's a bargain!" declared Andy spiritedly. "I think I have guessed a way to get you out of your difficulties."

"How?"

"I'll show you when you are ready to start."

Andy set to work with vigor. He went to the back of the wagon and fitted two boards into a kind of a runway. Then he poured corn into the trough, and hitched up the old horse.

"Now, drive the horse, and I'll attend to the corn," he said. "I won't give them as much as you think," he added, fearing the farmer would object to the use of so much of his feed.

It was not long before they were on the way. As the corn dropped along the road, the geese ran to pick the kernels up. Andy scattered some by hand. Soon he had the whole line of geese following the wagon.

"Now drive in the best spots," he said.

"I'll take to the fields," answered Mr. Pierce.

He was as good as his word, and traveling became easy for the geese, so that they made rapid progress. They kept on until nightfall, passing through Afton, where Andy bought a postal card and mailed it to Mr. Webb, stating his money had been left with Mr. Dawson. By eight o'clock the next morning they reached Wade, and there, at a place called the Collins' farm, Andy was paid off and given the clothing and shoes promised. He changed his suit in a shed on the farm, and then the youth bid his new friends good-by and went on his way.

CHAPTER VI

THE SKY RIDER

"HOLD on, there!"

"Don't stop me—out of the way!"

"Why, whatever is the matter with you?"

"The comet has fallen——"

"What?"

"On our barn."

"See here——"

"Run for your life. Let me go, let me go, let me—go!"

The speaker, giving the astonished Andy Nelson a shove, had darted past him down the hill with a wild shriek, eyes bulging and hair flying in the breeze.

It was the afternoon of the day Andy had said good-by to Mr. Pierce and his friends. He was making across country on foot to strike a little railroad town, having now money enough to afford a ride to Springfield.

Ascending a hilly rise, topped with a great grove of nut trees, Andy got a glimpse of a farm-

house. He was anticipating a fine cool draught of well water, when a terrific din sounded out beyond the grove. There were the violent snortings of cattle, the sound of smashing boards, a mixed cackle of all kinds of fowls, and thrilling human yells.

Suddenly rounding the road, there dashed straight into Andy's arms a terror-faced, tow-headed youth, the one who had now put down the hill as if horned demons were after him.

Andy divined that the center of commotion and its cause must focus at the farmhouse. He ran ahead to come in view of the structure.

"I declare!" gasped Andy.

Wherever there was a cow, a horse, or a chicken, the creature was in action. They seemed putting for shelter in a mad flight. Rushing along the path leading to the farmhouse, a gaunt, raw-boned farmer was sprinting as for a prize. He cast fearsome glances over his shoulder, and bawled out something to his wife, standing spell-bound in the open doorway, bounded past her, sweeping her off her feet, and slammed the door shut with a yell.

And then Andy's wondering eyes became fixed on an object that quite awed and startled him for the moment. Resting over the roof of the great barn at the rear of the house was a fantastic creation of sea-gull aspect, flapping great wings of

snowy whiteness. Spick and span, with graceful outlines, it suggested some great mechanical bird.

"Why," breathed Andy, lost in wondering yet enchanting amazement, "it's an airship!"

Andy had never seen a perfect aeroplane before. Small models had been exhibited at the county fair near Princeville, however, and he had studied all kinds of pictures of these remarkable sky-riders. The one on the barn fascinated him. It balanced and fluttered—a dainty creation—so frail and delicately adjusted that his mechanical admiration was aroused to a degree that was almost thrilling.

Blind to jeopardy, it seemed, a man was seated about the middle of the tilting air craft. The barn roof was about twenty-five feet high, but Andy could plainly make out the venturesome pilot, and his mechanical eye ran over the strange machine with interest and delight.

A hand lever seemed to propel the flyer, and this the man aloft grasped while his eyes roved over the scene below.

How the airship had got on the roof of the barn, Andy could only surmise. Either it had made a whimsical dive, or the motive power had failed. The trouble now was, Andy plainly saw, that one set of wings had caught across a tin ornament at the front gable of the barn.

This represented a rooster, and had been bent in two by the tugging airship.

"Hey, you!" sang out the man in charge of the airship. "Can you get up here any way?"

"There's a cleat ladder at the side."

"All right, come up and bring a rope with you."

Andy was only too glad to be of service in a new field that fascinated him. The doors of the barn were open. He ran in and looked about busily. At last he discovered a long rope hanging over a harness hook. He took possession of it, hurried again to the outside, and nimbly ascended the cleats.

"Look sharp, now, and follow closely," spoke the aeronaut. "Creep along the edge, there, and loop the rope under the end of those side wings."

"I can do that," declared Andy. He saw what the man wanted, and it was not much of a task to balance on the spout running along the edge of the shingles and then climb to the ridge-pole. Andy looped the end of the rope over an extending bar running out from the remote end of the last paddle.

"Now, then," called out the aeronaut in a highly-satisfied tone, "if you can get to the seat just behind me, fetching the rope with you, we'll soon be out of this tangle."

"All right," said Andy.

"And I'll give you the ride of your life."

"Will you, mister?" cried Andy, with bated breath and sparkling eyes.

The boy began creeping along the slant of the barn-roof. It was slow progress, for he saw that he must keep the rope from getting tangled. Another hindrance to rapid progress was the fact that he had to be careful not to graze or disturb the delicate wings of the machine.

About half the directed progress covered, Andy paused and looked down. The door of the farmhouse was in his range of vision, and the farmer had just opened it cautiously.

He stuck out his head, and bobbed it in again. The next minute he ventured out a little farther. Now he came out on the stoop of the house.

"Hey, you!" he yelled, waving his hands up at the aeronaut.

"Well, neighbor?" interrogated the latter.

"What kind of a new-fangled thing is that you've stuck on my barn?"

"It's an airship."

"Like we read about in the papers?"

"Yes."

"Sho! and I thought—— Who's afraid?" and he darted back again into the house. Immediately he reappeared. He carried an old-fashioned fowl-

"IT'S AN AIRSHIP!"

ing-piece, and he ran out directly in front of the barn.

Andy read his purpose. He readily guessed that the farmer was one of those miserly individuals who make the most out of a mishap—the kind who think it smart to put a dead calf in the road and make an automobilist think he had killed it. At all events, the farmer looked bold enough now, as he posed in the middle of the road, with the ominous announcement:

"I've got a word for you up there."

"What is it?" inquired the aeronaut.

"Who's going to settle for this damage?"

"What damage?"

"What damage!" howled the farmer, feigning great rage and indignation; "hosses jumped the fence and smashed down the gate; chickens so scared they won't lay for a month; wife in a spasm, and that there ornament up there—why, I brought that clear from the city."

"All right, neighbor; what's your bill?"

"Two hundred dollars."

The aeronaut laughed.

"You're not modest or anything!" he observed. "See here; I'll toss you a five-dollar bill, and that covers ten times the entire trouble I've made you."

The farmer lifted his gun. He squinted across the long, awkward barrel, and he pointed it straight up at the sky-rider and his craft.

"Mister," he said fiercely, "my bill is two hundred dollars, just as I said. You pay it, right here, right now, or I'll blow that giddy-fangled contraption of yours into a thousand pieces!"

CHAPTER VII

JOHN PARKS, AIRSHIP KING

"KEEP right on," ordered the aeronaut to Andy in a low tone.

Andy squeezed under a bulge of muslin and wood and reached what looked like a low, flat-topped stool.

"Do you hear me?" yelled the farmer, brandishing his weapon and trying to look very fierce and dangerous.

The aeronaut, Andy noticed, was reaching in his pocket. He drew out two small bills and some silver. He made a wad of this. Poising it, he gave it a fling.

"There's five dollars," he spoke to the farmer.

The wad hit the farmer on the shoulder, opened, and the silver scattered at his feet. He hopped aside.

"I won't take it; I'll have my price, or I'll have the law on you, and I'll take the law in my own hands!" he shouted.

Snap!—the fowling-piece made a sound, and quick-witted Andy noticed that it was not a click.

"See here," he whispered quickly to the aeronaut; "that man just snapped the trigger to scare us, and I don't believe the old blunderbuss is loaded."

"All ready," spoke the aeronaut to Andy, as the latter reached the seat.

"Yes, sir," reported Andy.

"When I back, give the rope a pull and hold taut till we clear the barn."

"I'll do it," said Andy.

"Go!"

There was a whir, a delicious tremulous lifting movement that now made Andy thrill all over, and the biplane backed as the aeronaut pulled a lever.

Andy gave the rope a pull and lifted the entangled wing entirely clear of the weather-vane.

"Now, hold tight and enjoy yourself," spoke the aeronaut, reversing the machine.

"Oh, my!" breathed Andy rapturously the next moment, and he forgot all about the farmer and nearly everything else mundane in the delight and novelty of a brand-new experience.

Andy had once shot the chutes, and had dreamed about it for a month afterwards. He recalled his first spin in an automobile with a thrill even now. That was nothing to the present sensa-

tion. He could not analyze it. He simply sat spellbound. One moment his breath seemed taken away; the next he seemed drawing in an atmosphere that set his nerves tingling and seemed to intoxicate mind and body.

The aeronaut sat grim and watchful in the pilot seat of the glider, never speaking a word. He had skimmed the landscape for quite a reach. Then, where the ground began to slant, he said quickly:

"Notice my left foot?"

"I do," said Andy.

"Put yours on the stabilizing shaft when I take mine off."

"Stabilizing shaft," repeated Andy, memorizing, "and the name of the airship painted on that big paddle is the *Eagle*. Oh, hurrah for the *Eagle*!"

"When I whistle once, press down with your foot. Twice, you take your foot off. When I whistle twice, pull over the handle right at your side on the center-drop."

" 'Center-drop'?" said Andy. "I'm getting it fast."

Z—zip! Andy fancied that something was wrong, for the machine contorted like a horse raising on his rear feet. Toot! Andy did not lose his nerve. Toot—toot! he grasped the handle at his side and pulled it back.

"Good for you!" commended the aeronaut heartily. "Now, then, for a spin."

Andy simply looked and felt for the next ten minutes. The pretty, dainty machine made him think of a skylark, an arrow, a rocket. He had a bouyant sensation like a person taking laughing gas.

The lifting planes moved readily under the manipulation of an expert hand. There was one level flight where the airship exceeded any railroad speed Andy had ever noted. Farms, villages, streams, hills, faded behind them in an endless panorama.

Toot!—Andy followed instructions. They slowed up over a town that seemed to be some railroad center. Beyond it the machine skimmed a broad prairie and then gracefully settled down in the center of a fenced-in space.

Its wheels struck the ground. They rolled along for about fifty yards, and halted by the side of a big tent with an open flap at one side.

"This is the stable," said the aeronaut, showing Andy how to get from his seat on the delicate and complicated apparatus of the flyer. "Dizzy-headed?"

"Why, no," replied Andy.

"Wasn't frightened a bit?"

"Not with you at the helm," declared Andy.

"Mister, if I could do that, I'd live up in the air all the time."

"You only think so," said the aeronaut, the smile of experience upon his practical but good-humored face. "When you've been at it as long as I have, you'll feel different. What's your name?"

"Andy Nelson."

"Out of a job?"

"Yes, sir."

The aeronaut looked Andy over critically.

"That little frame building at the end of the tent is where we keep house," he explained. "The big rambling barracks, once a coal-shed, is my shop. I'm John Parks. Ever hear of me?"

"No, sir," said Andy.

"I'm known all over the country as the Airship King."

"I can believe that," said Andy, "but, you see, I have never traveled far."

"I've made it a business giving exhibitions at fairs and aero meets with this glider and with a dirigible balloon. Just now I'm drilling for a prize race—five thousand dollars."

"That's some money," observed Andy, "and I guess you'll win it."

"I see you like me, and I like you," said John Parks. "Suppose you help me win that prize?

I need good loyal help around me, and the way you obey orders pleases me. I'll make you an offer—your keep and ten dollars."

"And I'll be near the airship?" asked Andy eagerly. "And learn to run it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my!" cried the boy, almost lifted off his feet. "Mr. Parks, I can't realize such good luck."

"It's yours for the choosing," said the aeronaut.

"Ten dollars a month and my board for helping run an airship!" said Andy breathlessly. "Oh, of course I'll take it—gladly."

"No," corrected John Parks, "ten dollars a week."

CHAPTER VIII

THE AERO FIELD

"THAT'S settled," said the Airship King. "Come, Andy, and I'll introduce you to our living quarters."

Andy felt as if he was treading on air. He was too overcome to speak intelligently. Clear of the spiteful Talbot brood, the proud possessor of a new suit, a watch, five dollars, and the prospect of a princely salary, he felt that life had indeed begun all over for him in golden numbers. He caught at the sleeve of his generous employer.

"Mr. Parks," he said with emotion, "it's like a dream."

"That's all right, Andy," laughed the aeronaut. "I'm pretty liberal, they say—that is, when I've got the money. I've seen my hard times, though. All I ask is to have a man stick to me through thick and thin and I'll bring him out all right."

"I'll stick to you as long as you'll let me," declared Andy.

"Yes, you're true blue, Andy, I honestly believe. I've staked a good deal on the aero meet next month. I've just got to get that five-thousand-dollar prize to make good, for I've invested a good deal here."

"I hope I can help you do it," said Andy fervently.

"The *Eagle* is only a trial craft. Over in the workshop yonder, I've got a genius of a fellow, named Morse, working for me, who is turning out the latest thing in airships. Here's our living quarters."

Mr. Parks led Andy into the shed-like structure that formed the back of the tent which sheltered the aeroplane and also a dirigible balloon. They passed through several partitioned-off spaces holding cots. Then there was a comfortable sitting room. Next to it was a kitchen.

This room was sizzling hot, for it held a big cooking-range, before which an aproned cook stood with an immense basting spoon in his hand. He was the blackest, fattest cook Andy had ever seen. His eyes were big with jolly fun, and his teeth gleamed white and full as he grinned and nodded.

"I've brought you a new boarder, Scipio," said Mr. Parks. "His name is Andy Nelson. You'll have to set another place."

Then he stepped through a doorway outside, and Scipio took a critical look at Andy.

" 'Nother plate, eh?" he chuckled. "Dat's motion easy, but what about de contents of dat plate? Fohteen biscuit do de roun's now. Yo' look like a likely healthy boy. I reckon I have to double up on de rations."

It was a royally good meal that was spread out on the table in the sitting room about four o'clock in the afternoon.

"Where's Mr. Morse, Scipio?" inquired Mr. Parks, as the cook brought in a smoking roast.

"Mistah Morse have to be excused dis reflection, sah, I believe," responded Scipio. "I ask him 'bout noon what he like foh dinnah. He dat 'sorbed in his work he muttah something 'bout fractions, 'quations and dirigible expulsions; I hab none ob dose to cook. Jus' now I go to call him to dinnah, an' I find him deeper than ever poring over dose wheels an' jimdracks ob machinery, and when I say de meal was ready, he observe dat de quintessimal prefix ob de cylinder was X. O. plus de jibboom ob de hobolinks. It sounded like dat, anyhow. Berry profound man, dat, sah. I take him in his meal later, specially, sah."

From this and other references to the man in the shop, Andy decided that Mr. Morse must be quite a proficient mechanician. He longed to get

a peep into his workshop. After dinner, however, Mr. Parks said:

"Would you like to stroll over to the big aero practice field, Andy?"

"I should, indeed," responded Andy.

He found the aviation field to be a more or less shrouded locality. It was reached only by crossing myriad railroad tracks, dodging oft-shunted freight-cars, scaling embankments and crossing ditches. The field was dotted with shelter tents for the various air machines, trial chutes and perfecting shops.

There were any number of monoplanes, biplanes and dirigible balloons. On the different tents was painted the name of the machine housed therein. There was the *Monigo, Glider,* the *Flying Dutchman,* the *Lady Killer,* and numerous other novelties with fanciful names.

"Every professional seems to be getting up the oddest freak he can think of," explained Parks. "Do you see that new-fangled affair with the round discs? That is called the helicopotol. That two-winged, one-hundred-bladed freak just beyond is the gyropter. Watch that fellow just going up with the tandem rig. That's a new thing, too. It's of the collapsible type, made for quick transportation, but not worth a cent as a racer."

Andy was in a realm of rare delight. He passed the happiest and most interesting hour of his life

looking over and studying all these wonderful aerial marvels about him.

When they got back to camp, the aeronaut showed Andy where he would sleep, and told him something about the routine.

"I am making test runs with the *Eagle*," he explained, "and will want you to sail with me for a day or two. Then you may try a grasshopper run or two yourself."

"I shall like it immensely," declared Andy with enthusiasm.

When Mr. Parks had left him, Andy wandered outside. The sound of a twanging banjo led him to the front of the kitchen quarters.

Seated on a box, his eyes closed, his face wearing an expression of supreme felicity, was Scipio. Strains of "My Old Kentucky Home" floated on the air. The musician, opening his eyes, happened to spy Andy.

"Tell you, chile," declared the portly old cook, with a rare sigh of longing, "des yar Scip could play dat tune all night long."

"Keep right at it, Scipio," smiled Andy. "You go on enjoying your music, while I do up any little chores you have to attend to."

"If it wouldn't be a deposition on yo'," remarked Scipio thoughtfully, "dar's de suppah dishes I'd like brung back from Mistah Morse's quarters."

"Can I find them?" inquired Andy.

"Yo' jess follow yo' nose down through the big shed," directed Scipio. "Mistah Morse nevah notice yo'. He's dat substracted he work all night."

Andy proceeded on his mission. Passing through one shed, he saw a light at the end of one adjoining. In the second shed he came to a halt with sparkling eyes and bated breath.

Across a light platform lay the skeleton of an airship. Its airy elegance and fine mechanism appealed to Andy intensely. He went clear around it, wishing he had the inventive faculty to construct some like masterpiece in its line.

Just beyond the machine was a small apartment where a light was burning. Near its doorway was a table upon which Andy observed a tray of dishes and the remnants of a meal.

He moved forward carefully to remove them, for seated at a work-bench and deeply engrossed in some work at a small lathe, was a man wearing great goggles on his eyes.

"It must be Mr. Morse, the airship inventor," thought Andy.

Just then the inventor removed his goggles, rubbed his eyes and turned his face towards Andy.

With a crash the boy dropped a plate, and with a profound start he drew back, staring blankly at the man at the bench.

"Oh, my!" said Andy breathlessly.

CHAPTER IX

THE AIRSHIP INVENTOR

MORSE, the inventor, made a grab for his eye-goggles. He had become a shade paler. He did not take up the goggles, however. Instead, he turned his back on Andy.

Our hero had a right to be startled. He stood staring and spellbound, for he had recognized the inventor in an instant. He was the handcuffed man he had poled down the river from Princeville the night of the flight from the Talbots, and who had given him the very watch he now carried in his pocket with such pride and satisfaction.

The man had shaved off his full beard since Andy had first met him. This made him look different. It was the large, restless eyes, however, that had betrayed his identity. Andy would know them anywhere. He at once realized that the inventor had sought to disguise himself. Probably, Andy reasoned, he had caught him off his guard with the goggles off his eyes.

"What did you say 'oh, my!' for?" suddenly demanded the inventor.

"I—I thought I recognized you—I thought I knew you," said Andy.

"Do you think so now?" inquired the inventor, turning sharply face about.

"I certainly thought I knew you."

"And suppose you was right?"

"If you were really the person I supposed," replied Andy, "I would have done just exactly what I promised to do when I last saw that person."

"And what was that?"

"To forget it."

"You'd keep your word, eh?"

"I generally try to."

The man's eyes seemed riveted on Andy in a peculiar way that made the boy squirm. There was something uncanny about it all. Andy experienced a decidedly disagreeable creeping sensation. The inventor was silent for a moment or two. Then he asked:

"Who sent you here?"

"I wasn't sent by any one. I just came."

"How?"

"With Mr. Parks—in his airship."

"Are you going to stay here?"

"He has hired me at ten dollars a week and board," proudly announced Andy.

"He's a good man," said Morse. "I don't think he'd pick you out if you were a bad boy. What time is it?"

This question was so significant that it flustered Andy. He drew out his watch in a blundering sort of a way, fancying that he detected the faint shadow of a smile on the face of his interlocutor.

"It's half-past seven," he reported.

"Watch keep good time?"

"Yes, sir. The man who gave it to me was the man whom I took you for."

"Good timepiece."

"Splendid."

"U-m. What's your name?"

"Andy Nelson."

"I'm going to trust you, Andy Nelson; I don't think I will have any reason to regret it."

"I will try to deserve your confidence, Mr. Morse."

"Oh, you know my name?"

"Yes, sir. I heard Mr. Parks speak of you."

"I see—of course. I must be cautious after this, though. I had an idea that shaving off my beard would change my appearance, but as you recognized me, I must not be seen by outsiders without my goggles. Andy, I do not wish Mr. Parks to know anything about that handcuff affair of mine."

"All right, sir."

"I suppose it struck you suspiciously."

"It did at first," confessed Andy. "When I came to think it over, though, I remembered that I was in trouble and acting suspiciously myself. I knew that I was right in my motives, and I hoped you were."

"I'll tell you something, Andy," said the inventor. "It won't be much for the present, but later I may tell you a good deal more. A bad crowd have a hold on me, a certain power that has enabled them to scare me and rob me at times. I am inventor. They knew that I was getting up a new airship. They captured me and locked me up. They demanded a price for my liberty—that I would disclose my plan to them. I consented. They even forced me to make a working model. The night before the day I intended to complete it I made my escape, but handcuffed. You came along and helped me on the way to freedom. After I left the barge on the creek I got to the home of a friend, disguised myself, and came here and hired out with Mr. Parks."

"But your invention the rascals got away from you?"

"Let them keep it," responded the inventor, "so long as they do not trouble me again. There was a defect in the model they stole from me. Unless

they are smart enough to remedy it, they may find out they haven't made so big a haul as they anticipate. Look here, Andy."

Mr. Morse beckoned our hero over to the work-bench and showed him a drawing.

"The work you see in the big room," he said, "is the skeleton of this machine. I am basing great hopes on it. I want to make a record in aviation, for I believe it will be the most promising field for inventors for many years to come. If you are going to work with us, you should know what is going on. This is my new model."

As Mr. Morse spoke, he became intent and eloquent. He lost himself in his enthusiasm as an inventor. Andy was a ready listener, and it was delightful to him to explore this marvel of machines.

"What I hope to accomplish," explained Mr. Morse, "is to construct a combined steerer and balancer on one lever. I aim to make this lever not only tilt the flyer to which it is attached on a transverse axis, but also on a longitudinal axis. It is called a double-action horizontal rudder, and if I succeed will give instantaneous control of a flying-machine under all conditions, be it a high wind or the failing of motive power. I combine with it a self-righting automatic balance. It is a brand-new idea. I thought those villains I have

told you about had stolen my greatest idea, but this beats it two to one."

"Will they try to use the invention they stole from you?" inquired Andy.

"Of course they will—to their cost—if they are too rash," declared the inventor seriously. "That was a rudder idea, too."

"Tell me about it, Mr. Morse," pleaded Andy; "I am greatly interested in it all."

"I am going to tell you, Andy," responded the inventor, "because I believe the men who imprisoned me will try to enter the prize contest, and I want to keep track of them. I don't dare venture among them myself, but I may ask you to seek them out and bring me some news."

"Yes, sir," said Andy.

"The head man of the crowd is an old circus man named Duske. It is a good name for him, for he is dark in looks and deed. The idea they have stolen from me is this: In place of the conventional airship rudder, I planned to equip the aeroplane with movable rear sections of pipe, the main sections of this pipe to extend the full length of the craft. Suction wheels at each end of the main tube force the air backwards through the tube, the force of this air explosion driving the nose of the craft into the air when the movable section of the tube is raised, lowering it when it is pointed downwards, and providing for its

lateral progress on the same principle. Do you follow me?"

"I can almost see the machine right before my eyes, the way you tell about it!" said Andy, with breathless enthusiasm.

CHAPTER X

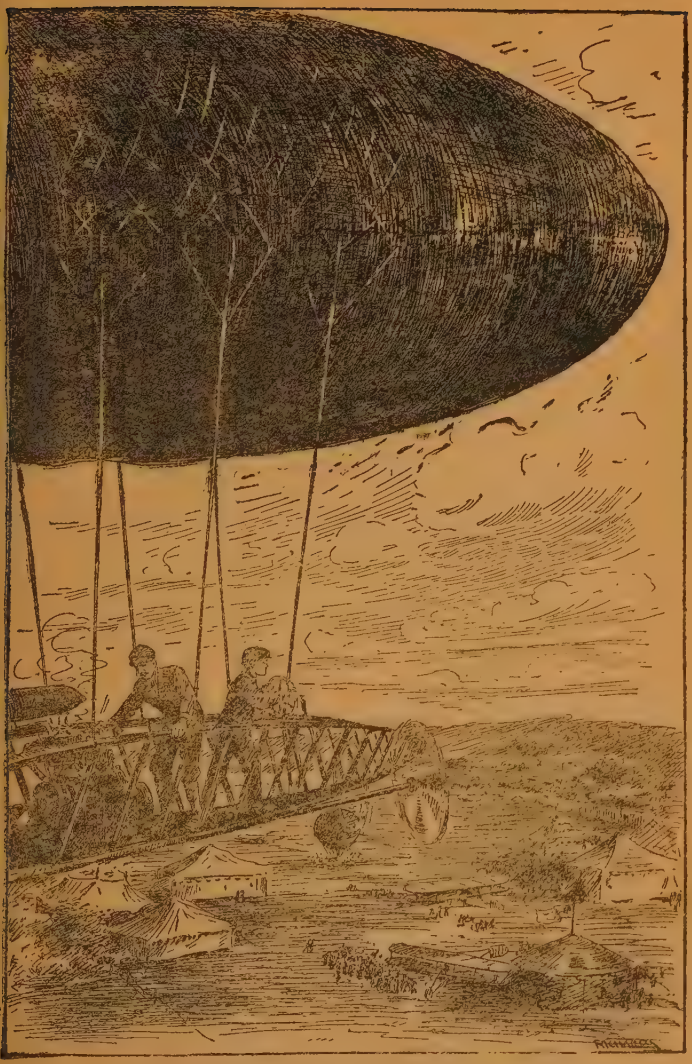
LEARNING TO FLY

THAT was the first of many pleasant and interesting visits that Andy had with Mr. Morse, the inventor. By the end of the week the automobile boy had become an airship enthusiast. Andy was charmed. When he was not pottering about the *Eagle* or sailing the air with John Parks, he was with Mr. Morse in a congenial atmosphere of mechanics.

Although John Parks was now engrossed in using his glider, he had not given up using his dirigible balloon, and he also gave Andy some lessons in running this.

The dirigible was shaped like a fat cigar, and had under it a frame-work carrying a thirty horse-power motor and two six-foot suction wheels. When there was no wind, the dirigible could sail quite well, but in a breeze it was hard to make much progress, and to use it in a high wind was entirely out of the question.

"The monoplanes and biplanes make the old-



HE GAVE ANDY SOME LESSONS IN RUNNING THIS

style balloons and the dirigibles take a back seat," said the Airship King. "But, just the same, if your motor gives out, a dirigible is a nice thing to float down in."

"I like the dirigible," answered Andy. "But for speed, give me the new kind of flying machines."

Andy was in his element among the lathes, vises, saws, and general tools of the workshop. Once or twice he made practical suggestions that pleased Morse greatly. The inventor rarely left the camp, and when he did it was generally after dark. There was material and aeroplane parts to purchase. These commissions were entrusted to Andy, and he showed intelligence in his selections. Once he had to go fifty miles on the railroad to a factory to have some special devices made. He used such dispatch, and was so successful in getting just what was wanted by staying with the order till it was filled, that Mr. Morse warmly commended him to Parks.

Andy had drifted completely away from the old life. He was fast forgetting all about the Talbots and his former troubles at Princeville. One day, in a burst of satisfaction over a trial flight Andy made alone in a monoplane, John Parks declared that he would not rest until he had made Andy the junior air king of America. Then Andy felt that he had found his mission

in life, and pursued his new avocation with more fervor than ever.

About all Parks thought or talked of was the coming aero meet. Andy learned that he was investing over two thousand dollars in maintaining the camp and in building the machine with which he was to compete for the prize. His success would mean something more than the winning of the five thousand dollars. It would add to the laurels already gained as the Air King in his former balloon experience, and would make him a prominent figure in the aviation field.

"Come on, Andy," he said to his young assistant one afternoon. "We'll stroll over to the main grounds and see what new wrinkle these ambitious fellows are getting up."

They spent an interesting hour over in the main enclosure where prospective exhibitors were located. There was quite a crowd of visitors. Some of the aviators were explaining the make-up of their machines, and others were making try-out flights. Parks and Andy were passing to the outfield where the test ascensions were in progress, when the former suddenly left the side of his companion.

Andy was surprised to see him hasten up behind a sinister-looking man, who was apparently explaining to an old farmer about the machines. Parks seized the man rudely by the arm and faced

him around squarely. The latter scowled, and then a strange, wilted expression came into his dark face.

"Excuse this gentleman, if you will," said Parks to the farmer.

"Why, suttinly," bobbed the ruralite. "Much obleeged to him for being so perlite in showing me 'round."

Parks drew the shrinking man he had halted to the side of a tent.

"Now, then, Gib Duske," he said sternly, "what were you up to with that greenhorn?"

"He told you, didn't he?" growled the other; "showing him the sights."

"You're given to doing such things for nothing!" rejoined Parks sarcastically. "I recall some of your exploits in that line in the rural districts when you were with the circus."

"See here," broke out the other angrily, "what is it your business?"

"Just this," retorted Parks steadily; "we're trying to run a decent enterprise here, and such persons as you have got to give an account of themselves or vacate. What's your game, anyhow?"

"I'm up to no game that I know of," sullenly muttered the man called Gib Duske. "If you must know, I've entered my airship for the race."

"You!" exclaimed Parks; "'your airship!' Where did you get an airship?"

"I suppose I have friends to back me like anybody else when they see a show for their money. I'm an old balloonist. A syndicate, knowing my professional skill, has put up the capital to give me a try."

"Oh, they have?" observed Parks incredulously. "I'd like to see your syndicate."

"And I've got my machine," declared Duske excitedly, "I'd have you know. I've heard you're entered. Fair play, then, and I'm going to beat the field."

Parks eyed his companion in speculative silence for a minute or two. Then he said:

"You talk about fair play. Good! You'll get it here, if you're square. If you're not, you had best take my warning right now, and cut out for good. There will be no balloon slitting like there was at a certain race you were in two years ago out West. The first freak or false play you make to queer an honest go, I'll expose you to the field."

"I've got no such intentions," mumbled Duske, with a malicious glance at his challenger.

"See you don't, that's all," retorted Parks, and walked off. "You noticed that man?" he added, as he rejoined Andy, who had listened with interest to the conversation.

"Yes, particularly," answered Andy, really able to tell his employer more than he dared.

"Whenever you run across him," went on the Air King, "keep your eyes wide open. I'd like to know just how much truth there is in his talk about entering for the race."

"Is he a bad man, Mr. Parks?" inquired Andy.

"He was once a confidence man," explained the aeronaut. "When I knew him he was giving balloon ascensions at a circus. He had a hired crowd picking pockets while people were staring up into the air watching his trapeze acts. Once at a race he slyly slit the balloon of an antagonist, who was nearly killed by the fall."

"I'll find out just what he is doing," exclaimed Andy.

"You can manage, for he knows me," observed Parks.

Andy said no more. He was pretty sure from the name and description that the fellow whom his employer had just called down was the enemy that Mr. Morse had told him about. He wished he could tell Mr. Parks all that he knew and surmised, but he could not break his promise to the inventor.

"Hello, there, Ridley!" hailed Parks, as they came to where a little, under-sized man was volubly boasting to an open-mouthed crowd about the superior merits of his machine. "Bragging again?"

"Go on, John Parks," called the little man

good-naturedly. "I'm not in your class, so what are you jumping on me for?"

"Oh, just to stir you up and keep you encouraged. I hear you've got a machine that will land just as steadily and balance on top of a telegraph-pole as on a prairie."

"That's pretty near the truth, John Parks," declared Ridley. "I can't make a mile in thirty seconds, but I can get to the ground on a straight dive ahead of your clumsy old *Eagle,* or any other racer on the field."

"Why, Ridley," retorted Parks, in a vaunting way, "I've got a boy here who can give you a handicap and double discount you."

"Is that him?" inquired Ridley, with a stare at Andy.

"That's him out of harness," laughed Parks. "Like to see him do something?"

"Just to show you're all bluster, I would," answered Ridley.

"Machine in order?"

"True as a trivet."

"Andy, give them a sample of a real bird diving, will you?"

"All right," said Andy.

He had not been tutored by his skillful employer vainly. Andy was in excellent practice. He got into the clear, started up the Ridley ma-

chine, and took a shoot on a straight slant up into the air about one hundred and fifty feet.

A cry of surprise went up from the watching group as Andy suddenly let the biplane slide on a sharp angle towards the ground, shutting off the power at the same time.

Again reaching a fair height, he tipped the biplane on an angle of five degrees and came down so fast that the spectators thought something was wrong. When the machine was within a yard of the ground, Andy brought it to the horizontal with ease and made a pretty landing.

"Well, Ridley," rallied John Parks, as the stupefied owner of the machine stared in open-mouthed wonder, "what do you say to that?"

"What do I say," repeated Ridley. "I say, look out for your laurels, John Parks. That boy is a wonder!"

CHAPTER XI

SPYING ON THE ENEMY

"THERE is that man again, Mr. Parks."

"Duske? Yes."

"Shall I follow him?"

"I'd like to know just what he is about."

"I would like to try and find out," declared Andy, with more eagerness than his employer suspected.

"All right, Andy; look him up a bit. Watch out for trouble, though, for he is a dangerous man."

It was late in the afternoon of the day succeeding Andy's sensational performance, and Parks and his young assistant were again on the aviation field.

Andy had made out the man whom Parks had called Duske carrying two cans of gasoline past a tent. He did not seem to have observed Parks, and Andy did not believe that he knew him. Andy left the side of his employer, and, circulating around kept Duske in sight from a distance.

The boy had not said anything to Mr. Morse about Duske. He felt certain that Duske was one of the enemies the inventor had described. Just at present, however, Andy considered it would be unwise to disturb Morse. The latter had almost completed the new airship. His mind was absorbed in his task, and he was working day and night.

Duske passed the last tent on the field, and then struck off beyond some old railroad sheds to the side of an abandoned switchyard. Scattered here and there over this space were several tents. They were occupied by aero contestants who had not been able to get a favorable location on the big field, or by those who had sought this seclusion because they wished to be isolated with some fancied new invention, the details of which they did not wish their contestants to learn.

Finally Duske seemed to arrive at his destination. It was where stout canvas had been stretched about fifty feet out from the blank side of an old frame shed. These strips of canvas and the shed cut out completely a view of what was beyond. The front of this enclosure was guarded by a roof set up on posts, this leading into the entrance tent of the main enclosure.

A man about as sinister looking as Duske himself was cooking something on a stove, and two others were lounging on a bench near by. Duske

carried the gasoline cans out of sight. Andy got around to the side of the enclosure, way back near its shed end.

It was getting well on toward nightfall, and he felt that he was secure in making some bold, prompt investigations. There was no doubt that the large tent enclosed the airship which Duske and his crowd intended to enter for the race. Andy attempted to lift the canvas at one or two points, but found it securely pegged to the ground.

"Humph!" he soliloquized, "everything nailed down tight. Must make their trial flights at midnight. They must think they have got a treasure in there. I've got to see it."

Finally Andy came to a laced section of the canvas, which he was able to press apart a foot or more by tight tugging. He squeezed through, and stood inside the enclosure.

There was light enough to show outlines, and with a good deal of curiosity Andy walked around and inspected an aeroplane propped up on a platform in the center of the enclosure. He came to a halt at one end of the machine. Two long hollow tubes extended beyond the folding planes.

"Why," breathed Andy, "it's the idea they stole from Mr. Morse. Here's the suction apparatus, and all!"

"Hi, there! who are you?"

The challenge came so sharp and sudden that

Andy was taken completely off his guard. Two men had come from the front tent, their footsteps being noiseless on the soft earth floor. One of them was the man Duske.

"Just looking around," replied Andy, edging away and pulling his cap down over his eyes.

"How did you get in here?"

"Slit in the canvas."

"Don't let him go—grab him," ordered Duske's companion quickly, and Andy began to back towards the canvas.

Duske reached out and made a grab at Andy. The latter dodged, but Duske's hand landed on his cap. His glance falling to the inside peak, he could not help reading there the words: "*Eagle*—Andy Nelson."

Nearly everything worn by Parks and Andy, as all the parts of the *Eagle,* were marked, so that in case of an accident identification would be easy.

"'*Eagle*'!" cried Duske, bristling up. "Do you belong to the *Eagle* crowd?"

"He's a spy—head him off!" shouted the other man.

"'*Eagle*'—'Andy Nelson'," continued Duske. "That's your name, is it? Now then, what are you snooking around here for?"

"What's that, what's that?" challenged the other man quickly. "'Andy Nelson?' Say,

Duske, that sounds familiar. I just read that name somewhere—I have it—in a newspaper——"

"Thunder! he's slipped us," exclaimed Duske.

Both men had started for Andy. The latter let them come on, ducked down, dove straight between them, ran to the slitted canvas, squeezed through, and sprinted away from the spot on feet of fleetness.

"I don't know how much I have mixed up affairs," he reflected, as he made for the home camp. "Those fellows know my name and that I am with Mr. Parks. What bothers me most, is what the man said about seeing my name in a newspaper. Some one here—in an automobile."

As Andy reached home he observed an automobile in front of the living quarters. A man came out as Andy stood wondering who the visitor could be. Andy noticed that he carried a small black case.

"A doctor," he decided hastily. "Can any one be sick? What has happened?" he asked, as Scipio came out.

"Hahd luck, chile, hahd luck!" replied the cook very seriously. "Yo bettah see Mistah Parks right away."

Andy hurried to the sitting room. Lying covered up on a couch, his right arm in splints, and looking pale and distressed, was the aeronaut.

"Oh, Mr. Parks! what is the matter?" asked Andy in alarm.

"Everything off, lad," replied his employer, with a wince and a groan. "I've had a bad fall, arm broken in two places, and we can't make the airship race."

CHAPTER XII

TRACED DOWN

"Be careful, Mr. Parks!"

"Foh goodness sake, sah! Yo want to break dat arm ober again?"

Mr. Morse, the inventor, and Scipio, the cook, made a frantic rush for the aeronaut. They were grouped together in the center of the space occupied by their camp. The eyes of each had been fixed on an object floating about in the air overhead. All had been pleased and excited, but particularly Parks. Now as the object aloft made a skim that seemed to beat a mile a minute dash, John Parks lost all control of himself.

He forgot the fractured arm he had carried in a sling for three days, and actually tried to wave it, as he burst forth:

"Morse, you're a genius, and that boy, Andy Nelson, is the birdman of the century!"

Andy deserved the praise fully that was being bestowed upon him. That morning Mr. Morse had completed the *Racing Star*, his new airship.

At the present moment it was making its initial flight.

The relieved, contented face of Morse showed his satisfaction over the fact that his work was done and done well. Scipio stared goggle-eyed. As to John Parks, expert sky sailor that he was, his practiced eye in one moment had discerned the fact that the *Racing Star* was the latest and best thing out in aviation, and he went fairly wild over the masterly way in which Andy handled the machine.

Andy aloft, had eye, nerve and breath strained to test the splendid device to its complete capacity. He was himself amazed at the beauty the utility of the dainty creation just turned out from the workshop. What the Airship King had taught him Andy had not forgotten. After five minutes spent in exploiting every angle of skill he possessed, Andy brought the superb aeroplane down to the ground, graceful as a swan. John Parks ran up to him, chuckling with delight.

"You wonder! you daisy!" he roared, shaking Andy's hand with his well arm.

Andy was flushed with triumph and excitement.

"If there's any wonder to talk about," he said, "it's that glorious piece of work, the *Racing Star,* and the splendid man who made it."

Morse smiled, a rare thing for him. Then he said modestly:

"It will do the work, handled as you manage it, Andy."

"I feel like a caged lion, or an eagle with its wings clipped!" stormed Parks, with a glance at his bandaged arm. "Why did I go trying to show a bungling amateur how to run an old wreck of a monoplane, and get my arm broken for my pains, and lose that five-thousand-dollar prize!"

"There is time to enter a substitute, Mr. Parks," suggested the inventor.

"Who?" demanded the aeronaut scornfully. "Some amateur who will sell me out or bungle the race, and maybe smash up my last thousand dollars?"

"Mr. Parks," said Andy, in a quick breath, and colored up and paused suddenly. "I'd be glad to try it. Say the word, and I'll train day and night for the race."

"Andy, win it, and half of that five thousand dollars is yours."

From excitement and incoherency, the little group got down to a serious discussion of the situation during the next half hour.

"It's just one week from the race," said Andy. "What can't I do in learning to run the *Racing Star* in that time?"

"Andy, you must make it," declared Parks energetically. "It just seems as if my heart would break if we lost this record."

Mr. Morse got out a chart he had drawn of the run to be made on the twenty-first of the month.

"The course is very nearly a straight one," explained Parks; "from the grounds here to Springfield, where the State fair is going on. Pace will be set by a Central Northern train, carrying assistants and repairs. The fleet will be directed by a large American flag floating from the rear of the train. It's almost a beeline, Andy, and the *Racing Star* is built for speed."

They made another ascent the next morning. Air and breeze conditions were most favorable for the try-out. Seated amidships, wearing a leather jacket, cap and gloves, Andy had the motor keyed up to its highest speed. The quick sequence of its exhaust swelled like a rapid-fire gun.

The machine rolled forward, the propellers beat the air, and the *Racing Star* rose on a smooth parabola. Andy attempted some volplane skits that were fairly hair-raising. He raced with real birds. He practiced with the wind checks. For half an hour he kept up a series of practice stunts of the most difficult character.

"Oh, but you're a crack scholar, Andy Nelson," declared the delighted Parks, as the *Racing Star* came to moorings again, light as a feather.

"I think myself I am getting on to most of the

curves," said Andy. "The only question is can I keep it up on a long stretch?"

"Practice makes perfect, you know," suggested Mr. Morse.

Andy felt that he had about reached the acme of his mechanical ambition. When he went to bed that night the thought of the coming race kept him awake till midnight. When he finally went to sleep, it was to dream of aerial flights that resolved themselves into a series of the most exciting nightmares.

No developments came from Andy's experience with the Duske crowd. Once in a while he worried some over the reference of Duske's companions to seeing his name in the newspapers.

"Either it was about my trouble at Princeville, or some of these reporters writing up the race got my name incidentally," decided Andy.

"Anyhow, I can't afford to trouble about it."

Andy rarely ventured away from the camp after dark. In fact, ever since entering the employment of Mr. Parks he had not mixed much with outsiders. He had his Princeville friends and the Duske crowd constantly in mind. But one hot evening he went forth for some ice cream for the crowd.

The distance to a town restaurant was not great. Andy hurried across the freight tracks.

Just as he passed a switchman's shanty, he fancied he heard some one utter a slight cry of surprise. Two persons dodged back out of the light of a switch lantern. Andy, however, paid little attention to the episode. He reached the restaurant, got the ice cream in a pasteboard box, and started back for the camp without any mishap or adventure.

Just as Andy crossed a patch of ground covered with high rank weeds, he became aware that somebody was following him. A swift backward glance revealed two slouching figures. They pressed forward as Andy momentarily halted.

"Now then!" spoke one of them suddenly.

Andy dodged as something was thrown towards him, but not in time to avoid a looped rope. It was handled deftly, for before he knew it his hands were bound tightly to his side.

One of the twain ran at him and tripped him up. The other twined the loose line about Andy's ankles.

"Got him!" sounded a triumphant voice.

"Good business," chirped his companion, and then Andy thrilled in some dismay, as he recognized his captors as Gus Talbot and Dale Billings.

"Hello, Andy Nelson," said Gus Talbot.

Gus's voice was sneering and offensive as he hailed the captive. His companion looked satis-

fied and triumphant as he stood over Andy, as if he expected their victim to applaud him for doing something particularly smart.

"See here, Gus," observed Dale, "I'd better get, hey?"

"Right off, too," responded Gus. "If there's the ready cash in it, all right. If there isn't we'll get him on the way to Princeville ourselves some way."

"Can you manage him alone?"

"I'll try to," observed Gus vauntingly, "I'll just have a pleasant little chat with him for the sake of old times, while I sample this ice cream of his—um-um—it ought to be prime."

Dale sped away on some mysterious errand. Gus picked up the box of ice cream that Andy had dropped and opened it. He tore off one of its pasteboard flaps, fashioned it into an impromptu spoon, and proceeded to fill his mouth with the cream.

"Don't you get up," he warned Andy. "If you do, I'll knock you down again."

"Big Injun, aren't you!" flared out Andy, provoked and indignant—"especially where you've got a fellow whipsawed?"

"Betcher life," sneered Gus maliciously. "Things worked to a charm. Got a hint from some airship fellows that you was somewhere

around these diggings. Watched out for you and caught you just right, hey?"

The speaker sat down among the weeds in front of Andy. The latter noticed that his face was grimed and his hands stained with dirt. His clothes were wrinkled and disordered as if he had been sleeping in them. From what he observed, Andy decided that the son of the Princeville garage owner and his companion were on a tramp. They looked like runaways, and did not appear to be at all prosperous.

"Say," blurted out Gus, digging down into the ice cream, as if he was hungry, "you might better have turned up that two hundred dollars for dad."

"Why had I?" demanded Andy.

"It would have saved you a good deal of trouble. It's a stroke of luck, running across you just as we'd spent our last dime. How will you like to go back to Princeville and face the music?"

"What music?"

"Oh, yes, you don't know! Haven't read the papers, I suppose? Didn't know you was wanted?"

"Who wants me?"

"Nor that a reward was out for you?"

"Why?"

"Say, are you so innocent as all that, or just plain slick?" drawled Gus, with a crafty grin.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Farmer Jones' barn."

"Oh——" Andy gave a start. He began to understand now. "What about Farmer Jones' barn?"

"You know, I guess. It was set on fire and burned down. They have been looking everywhere for the firebug, and offer a fifty-dollar reward."

"Is that the reason why you and Dale have left Princeville?" demanded Andy coolly.

"Eh, well, I guess not," cried Gus. "Huh! Everybody knows how you did it out of spite against Jones because he hindered you running away from dad. Why, they found your cap right near the barn ruins."

"Is that so?" said Andy quietly. "How did it get there?"

"How did it get there? You dropped it there, of course."

"Purposely to get blamed for it, I suppose?" commented Andy. "That's pretty thin, Gus Talbot, seeing that you know and your father knows that my cap was taken away from me when he locked me up at the garage, and I had no chance to get it later. You left the cap near the burned barn, Gus Talbot, and you know it."

"Me? Rot!" ejaculated Gus, but he stopped eating the ice cream and acted restless.

"In fact," continued Andy definitely, "I can prove that both you and Dale were sneaking about the Jones' place a short time before the fire broke out."

"Bosh!" mumbled Gus.

"Further than that, I can tell you word for word what passed between you two. Listen."

Andy remembered clearly every incident of his flight from the haystack in Farmer Jones' field. He recited graphically the appearance of Gus and Dale, and the remark he had overheard. Gus sat staring at him in an uneasy way. He acted bored, and seemed at a loss to answer.

It was more than half an hour before Dale returned. He acted glum and mad.

"Is it all right?" inquired Gus eagerly.

"Right nothing!"

"Get the money?"

"No."

"What's the trouble?"

"I saw a constable and told him I could give him a chance to make a fifty-dollar reward, us to get ten. He heard me through and said it wouldn't do."

"Why wouldn't it?" demanded Gus.

"Because this is in another county, and he'd have to get the warrant. Said it was too much trouble to bother with it."

"Humph! what will we do now?" muttered Gus in a disgusted way.

"That's easy. Get Andy over the county line, and find someone else to take the job off our hands," replied Dale Billings.

CHAPTER XIII

JIU-JITSU

"COME on," ordered Gus to Andy, unfastening the end of the rope and giving it a jerk.

"Hey, not that way," dissented Dale.

"Why not?"

"Think you can parade him through the town without attracting attention? We've got to be careful to cut out from here without a soul seeing us till we strike a country road. You march," commanded Gus anew to his captive, heading in another direction. "And you just so much as peep if we meet anybody, and you get a whack of this big stick."

Andy submitted to circumstances. He figured out that it would be some time before his captors could perfect their arrangements for interesting some officer of the law in their scheme. He readily guessed that for some reason or other they did not wish or dare to return personally to Princeville. Andy calculated that it was nearly ten miles to the county line. He believed he would

have half a dozen chances to break away from his captors before they reached it.

"Huh, what you going to do now?" inquired Gus in a grumbling tone, as they came directly up against a high board fence.

"You wait here a minute," directed Dale.

The speaker ran down the fence in one direction to face at its end a busy field occupied by aviation tents. He tried the opposite direction to find matters still worse, for there the fence ended against a lighted street of the town.

"What's beyond the fence?" inquired Gus.

"Not much of anything—a sort of a prairie," reported Dale, peering through a crack in the fence.

"We can't scale it."

"Not with Andy in tow. Here we are, though."

Dale had discovered a loose board. He began tugging at its lower end, and succeeded in pulling it far enough out to admit of their crowding through the opening. He went first, grabbing and holding Andy till Gus made the passage.

"Keep away from those lights over yonder," ordered Dale, indicating a point on the broad expanse where some aeroplane tents showed. "This way, I tell you," he added in a hoarse, hurried whisper. "There's a man."

Andy pushed forward, came to a dead halt,

bracing himself as his captors tried to pull him out of range of a man seated on a hummock, apparently watching some night manœuvres of airships over where the lights showed.

"Mister, oh, mister!" shouted Andy.

He received a blow on the mouth from the fist of Gus, but that did not prevent him from renewing the outcry. The man sprang quickly to his feet and came towards them.

He was small, thin, dark-faced, and so undersized and effeminate-looking that Andy at once decided that he would not count for much in a tussle with two stout, active boys. Dale thought so, too, evidently, for he squared up in front of Andy, trying to hide him from the view of the stranger, while Gus attempted to pull his captive back towards the fence. Andy, however, gave a jerk that drew Gus almost off his feet, and a bunt to Dale that sent him forcibly to one side.

"What is this?" spoke the stranger in a soft, mellow, almost womanly tone of voice. "Did some one then call?"

"It was I," proclaimed Andy. "These fellows have tied me up and are trying to kidnap me."

"It is wrong, I will so investigate," said the little man, coming straight up to the group and scanning each keenly in turn.

"See here," spoke Dale, springing in front of the man, "this is none of your business."

"Oh, yes, it is," returned the stranger in the same gentle, purring way. "I am interested. Speak on, young man."

"Get him away!" directed Dale in a sharp whisper to Gus.

Then, quick as lightning, he made a pass at the stranger. He was double the weight of the latter and half a head taller. Andy expected to see his champion flatten out like the weakling he looked.

"Ah," said the latter, "it is so you answer questions. My way, then."

What he did he did so quickly that Andy could not follow all of his movements. The hands of the little man moved about like those of an expert weaver at the loom. The result was a marvel. In some way he caught Dale around the neck. The next moment he swung him from the ground past his shoulder and his adversary landed with a thump.

Gus dropped the rope and ran at the stranger, club uplifted. Again the wiry strength of the little man was exerted. He seemed to stoop, and his arms enclosed Gus about the hips. There was a tug and tussle. Gus was wrenched from his footing, and went skidding to the ground, face down, for nearly two yards.

"Thunder!" he shouted, wiping the sand from his mouth.

THE WIRY STRENGTH OF THE LITTLE MAN WAS EXERTED

"Go," said the stranger, advancing upon the prostrate twain, who scrambled promptly to their feet.

Both dove for the loose plank in the fence and disappeared through it. The stranger drew out a pocket-knife and relieved Andy of his bonds.

"I look at you and then at those two," he said simply, "and your face tells me the true story. Where would you go?"

Andy pointed in the direction of the Parks' Aerodome, and the man walked by his side in its direction.

"I don't care to have those fellows find out where I am working," explained Andy. "Mister," he added admiringly, "how did you do it?"

"It was simple jiu-jitsu."

"Eh? Oh, yes, I've heard of that," said Andy, but vaguely. "It's a new Japanese wrestling trick, isn't it?"

"I am from Japan," observed his companion with a courteous dignity of manner that impressed Andy.

"I see," nodded Andy, "and you come from a wonderful people."

"We strive to learn," replied his companion. "That is why I am here. I was sent to this country to study aeronautics. Besides that, the science has a peculiar attraction for me. My

father was chief kite maker to the family of the Mikado."

"Is it possible?" said Andy.

"I therefore have an absorbing interest in your airmen and their daring work. You must know that we make wonderful kites in my home country."

"I have heard something of it," said Andy.

"Two hundred years ago many of the principles now used in your airships were used in our kite flying, only we never tried to fly ourselves."

"We have a gentleman up at our camp who would be just delighted to talk with you," declared Andy enthusiastically. "He is an inventor, a Mr. Morse."

"I should like to meet him," said the Japanese.

"Then come right along with me," invited Andy cordially; "only, say, please, don't mention the fix you found me in."

"It shall be so," declared his companion.

Andy made sure that his recent captors were not following them as they made a cut across a field and reached the Parks' camp. He led his guest into the sitting room of the living building, to find his employer and Mr. Morse there. Andy introduced his companion. It did not take long for the inventor to discover a kindred spirit in the Japanese, who gave his name as Tsilsuma.

That night after he had got into bed Andy

wondered if he had not better tell Mr. Morse or his employer his entire story, and the former about the near proximity of his old-time enemy, Duske. Then, too, he worried some over the appearance of Gus and Dale and his daily risk of being arrested. With daylight, however, Andy forgot all these minor troubles.

There was to be a race for a small prize that afternoon on the aviation field, and Parks had arranged for the *Racing Star* to participate. The aeronaut was busy half the morning seeing to the machine, while Mr. Morse flitted about adjusting a device suggested by the intelligent Tsilsuma for folding the floats under the aeroplane. The Japanese, too, had suggested sled runners in front and wheels at the rear for starting gear.

The *Racing Star* had not appeared in the general field before, and this was a kind of qualification flight. Just after two o'clock Parks made his final inspection of the bearings of the motors and the word to go was given. Andy sailed over the railroad tracks and landed in the field half a mile distant, with a dexterity that made his rivals there take a good deal of notice of him and the *Racing Star*.

When the word came Andy started the motor, and a friend of the aeronaut tugged at the propellers. With a blast that resembled a cyclone the airship started.

The helpers worked at the rudders, and after a run of only seventy-five feet the *Racing Star* shot up into the air.

Andy tried a preliminary stunt that he had practiced for two days past. It was to fly around the field in a figure eight at a height of ninety-five feet. Then, just to test the excellency of the machine, he plunged for the ground.

"The boy will kill himself!" shouted the man in charge of the race, but just at the critical moment Andy shifted his steering planes and flew across the ground, barely skimming the grass.

Once in this fashion he went around the course, then another upward lunge and he circled back to the starting point and came gently to earth. The crowds sent up an enthusiastic roar.

Four other machines made their exhibition in turn. Two went through a clumsy process, one became disabled, and the other retired with the derisive criticism of "Grasshopper!" as its pilot failed to lift it more than ten feet from the ground at any time.

"Mind the wind checks, Andy, lad," warned John Parks anxiously, as the three aeroplanes were ranged for the prize test of a mile run around the course.

"I'll be the pathfinder or nothing!" declared Andy, his eyes bright and observant, his nerves tingling with the excitement of the moment.

"Go!"

The three powerful mechanical birds arose in the air, dainty creations of grace and beauty, Andy in the lead. Then his nearest competitor passed him. Then No. 3 shot ahead of the other two, and then the turn.

"Huzza!" breathed Parks.

At his side, safe from recognition in his great disfiguring goggles, Mr. Morse moved restlessly from foot to foot. The *Racing Star* had accomplished what he had worked so hard to bring about—a true circle in a rapid turn.

The two other machines bungled. One nearly upset. Down the course came Andy, headed like an arrow for the starting point. A slanting dive, and the *Racing Star* skimmed the ground fully five hundred feet in advance of the nearest opponent.

Watch in hand, John Parks ran up to Andy, his face aglow with professional pride and delight.

"Won the race—but better than that you have beat the home record by eight seconds!"

"Winner, the *Racing Star,*" sang out the starter.

And then he added:

"Time: forty-eight seconds and seven-eighths."

"Hurrah!" shouted John Parks, throwing his hat in the air.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD LEATHER POCKETBOOK

"No SKY-SAILING to-day, Andy," said John Parks, the aeronaut.

"I guess you are right," answered Andy.

"A rest won't do you any harm. There are three days before the last event, and plenty of time to try Morse's new wrinkles."

"I think I'll go and see what the latest one is," said Andy.

It was a rainy day with a strong breeze, and waste of time, Andy well knew, to attempt any flights under the conditions. He went to the workshop to find Mr. Morse and the Japanese deep in discussion over some angle of a new reversible plane, they called it. Tsilsuma had become almost a fixture at the Parks' camp. He was unobtrusive generally, but his instincts and mission to delve and absorb were accommodated and encouraged by the inventor, and a strong friendship had sprung up between the two.

Andy wandered about promiscuously, time

hanging heavily on his hands. Finally he settled down in the comfortable sitting room looking over some books on scientific subjects, and picking out here and there a simple fact among a group of very abstruse ones.

"If ever I get any money ahead," he observed, "I'll put some of it into education, and I'll study up aeronautics first thing. It seems as if it's natural for me to see right through a machine first time I see it, but I don't understand the real principles, for all that. No, sir, it's brains like Mr. Morse has got that counts. If sky-sailing is going to last, and I follow it up, I'm going to dig deep right down into it, college fashion, and really understand my business. Hello!"

Andy had laid aside the scientific book and had taken up a newspaper. Glancing over its columns, his eye became fixed upon an advertisement occupying a prominent position just under some local reading matter. This is what it read.

NOTICE—IMPORTANT!

LOST—Somewhere on a train between Macon and Greenville, an old leather pocketbook, marked Robert Webb, Springfield, and containing $200. The finder may keep the money, and upon return of the pocketbook will be handsomely rewarded.

WEST, THORBURN & CASTLE, *Attorneys*,
BUTLER BLOCK, GREENVILLE.

"Well," aspirated Andy energetically, "here's something new!"

The incident stirred up his thought so much that he found himself walking the floor restlessly. Andy had a vivid imagination, and he built up all kinds of fancies about the singular advertisement.

"Wonder what lies under all this?" ruminated Andy. "They don't want the two hundred dollars, and they offer more money to get back that old pocketbook! They will never get the whole of it, though, that's certain. Gus Talbot tore off the flap of it. The rest of it—lying in my old clothes in that shed on the Collins farm, where I helped drive those geese. There was nothing left in the pocketbook, I am sure of that. What can they want it for, then? Evidently Mr. Webb didn't get my postal card."

Andy could not figure this out. He found it impossible, however, to dismiss the subject from his mind.

"People don't go to all the bother that advertising shows," he reasoned, "unless it's mighty important. Can I get the pocketbook, though, after all. I threw it carelessly up on a sort of a shelf in that old shed, and it may have been removed and destroyed with other rubbish. I've got the day before me, with nothing to do. I wouldn't be at all sorry if the two hundred dollars

came my way in a fair, square manner. I'll run down to Greenville. It won't take four hours, there and back. I'll see what there is to this affair—yes, I'll do it."

Andy sought out Mr. Parks and told him he was going to take a run down to Greenville on business, and would be back by evening at the latest. He caught a train about ten o'clock, and noon found him at the door of the law offices of West, Thorburn & Castle, Butler Block. Our hero entered one of three offices, where he saw a gentleman seated at a desk.

"I would like to see some member of the firm," he said.

"I am Mr. West," answered the lawyer.

"It is about an advertisement you put in the paper about a lost pocketbook," explained Andy.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. West, looking interested at once, and arising and closing the door. "Do you know something about it?"

"I know all about it," declared Andy. "In fact, I found it only a few minutes after it was lost."

"On the train?"

"No, sir. Mr. Webb did not lose it on the train."

"He thinks he did."

"He is mistaken," said Andy. "He lost it in

an automobile that took him on a rush run from Princeville across country to Macon. I was his chauffeur, and found it."

"Where is the pocketbook?" inquired the lawyer eagerly. "Have you brought it with you?"

"No, sir; but I think I can get it."

"We will make it richly worth your while," said Mr. West.

"There is something I had better explain about it," said Andy.

"Spent the two hundred dollars?" insinuated the lawyer, with an indulgent smile.

"Oh, no—the two hundred dollars is waiting for Mr. Webb to claim it with Mr. Dawson, the banker at Princeville. Let me tell you my story, Mr. West, and then you will understand better."

Andy told his story. He had a surprised, but intent listener. When he had concluded, the lawyer shook his hand warmly.

"Young man, you are a good, honest young fellow, and you will not regret acting square in this affair. Mr. Webb did not get your postal card, because he is no longer located at Springfield. How far from here is the farm you spoke of where you left the pocketbook?"

"About eighteen miles, I should think."

"Can you get there by rail?"

"Within two miles of it."

"And soon?"

"Why, yes, sir," replied Andy, glancing at his watch. "There is a train west in a quarter of an hour."

"At any expense," said Mr. West earnestly, "get there and return with the pocketbook. As to your reward——"

"Don't speak of it," said Andy. "Mr. Webb treated me handsomely when I brought him over to Macon. I can't imagine, though, why he puts so much store by the pocketbook."

"If you find it, he will tell you why," responded Mr. West. "You will be doing the best piece of work you ever did in finding that pocketbook. I shall telegraph my client to come here at once. He will be here by four o'clock."

"And I will be here not more than an hour later," said Andy.

He left the office on a brisk walk, planning his proposed route to the old farm. As he reached the street, he again glanced at his watch and found he had just ten minutes to reach the depot. Andy made a running spurt down the pavement.

He dodged an automobile speeding around a corner, heard its driver shout something he did not catch. Then he heard the machine turn and start furiously down the street in the direction he was going.

Andy sáw some people stare at him, halt, and then look towards the speeding machine. Won-

dering what was up, he glanced back to notice the driver of the machine waving one hand frantically towards him as if bent on overtaking him.

At the same moment the man in the machine bawled out:

"Hey, stop that boy!"

CHAPTER XV

BEHIND THE BARS

ANDY stopped running at the loud alarm from the automobile. Several persons started to block his course and one man caught him by the coat sleeve. Andy recognized his pursuer at once. It was Seth Talbot.

The Princeville garage owner ran his car up to the curb and jumped out. His face was red with exertion and excitement, and he grasped Andy roughly by the arm.

"What's the trouble?" queried the man who had detained Andy.

"Escaped criminal—firebug," mumbled Talbot. "In with you," and he forced Andy into the machine. "Hey, officer, take charge of this prisoner."

Talbot hailed a man in uniform pressing his way through the gathering crowd.

"What is he charged with?" inquired the officer.

"Burning a barn at Princeville. Get him to the station and I'll explain to your chief."

There was no chance for Andy to expostulate or struggle. The officer held him tightly by one wrist, while Talbot whisked them away till they reached a police station.

Here the garage owner drew the officer in charge to one side. They held a brief consultation. Andy caught a word here and there. It was sufficient to apprise him of the fact that there was a reward offered for his arrest, and Talbot was agreeing to divide it with the officer if he would take charge of Andy till he was delivered over to the authorities at Princeville.

"You are in charge of the law now, young man," said the officer, leading Andy back to the automobile. "I won't shackle you, but don't try any tricks."

He and Andy occupied the rear seat in the automobile, while Talbot drove the machine.

"May I say something to you?" inquired Andy of the officer.

"About what?" asked the officer.

"My being arrested this way. I don't see what right Mr. Talbot has to chase me and give orders about me like some condemned felon. I haven't seen any warrant for my arrest."

"You'll see it soon enough. Meanwhile don't say anything to incriminate yourself," returned

the officer, glibly using the pet phrase of his calling.

"I've done nothing to be incriminated," declared Andy indignantly. "What I wanted to ask was the simple favor of getting word to some people here in Greenville, who have sent me on an errand, and will be put out and disappointed if I don't show up."

"What people?" quizzed Talbot, overhearing Andy and half turning around in his seat.

"A firm of lawyers here——" began Andy.

"Yah!" derided the garage owner. "Guessed it was something of that sort. Want to tangle up this affair with some legal quibble! Officer, you just hold on to him tight. He's a slippery fellow."

Andy saw that it would be useless to appeal to either of his companions in the automobile, and put in his time doing some pretty serious thinking as the machine sped over the landscape.

"This is a bad fix at a bad time," reflected Andy. "The lawyer will expect me back as I promised, and think all kinds of things about me because I don't come. And there's Mr. Parks. And the race. I mustn't miss that! But then, I am arrested. They'll lock me up. Suppose they really prove I fired that barn?" Andy's heart beat painfully with dread and suspense.

The town hall at Princeville was reached. Andy

had been in the main offices of the structure many times, but this was his first visit to the lower floor of the building where the prisoners were kept. He only casually knew the deputy sheriff in charge of the barred cage, and who looked Andy over as he would any criminal brought to him to lock up.

"This is Andy Nelson—Jones' barn—ran away —reward." Andy was somewhat chilled as the deputy nodded and proceeded to enter his name in a big book before him on the desk.

"Search him," said the official to the turnkey.

"Hello!" ejaculated Talbot, as Andy's watch was brought into view, and "hello!" he repeated with eyes goggling still more, as Andy's pocket-book came to light, and outside of some small bills and silver, a neatly-folded bill was produced.

The officer himself looked surprised at this. Andy, however, did not tell them that this represented the prize he had won at the aviation meet, treasured proudly in its entirety.

"Wonder if that's some of the money I've found short in my business?" insinuated Talbot.

"If there is any shortage in your receipts," retorted Andy indignantly, "you had better ask your son about it."

The shot told. The garage owner flushed up.

"What's that?" he covered his evident confu-

sion by asking, as the officer unfolded a slip of printed paper.

It was the advertisement about the lost leather pocketbook, that Andy had preserved. Glancing over the shoulder of the officer and taking in its purport, Talbot gave a start. Then he eyed Andy in an eager, speculative way, but was silent.

"What are you going to do with me?" Andy asked of the officer.

"Lock you up, of course."

"Won't I be allowed to send word to my friends?"

"Who are they?" demanded the officer.

"I think Mr. Dawson, the banker, is one of them," replied Andy.

"Mr. Dawson has been away from town for a week, and will not return for two."

Andy's face fell. The thought of the banker had come to him hopefully.

"Can I telegraph, then?" he asked, "to friends out of town?"

"Telegraph," sneered Talbot. "My great pumpkins, with your new suit of clothes and watch and one hundred dollar bills and telegrams!"

"I can grant you no favors before I have notified the prosecuting attorney of your arrest," said the deputy. "Lock him up, turnkey."

All this seemed very harsh and ominous to Andy, but he did not allow it to depress him. He followed the turnkey without another word. The latter unlocked a great barred door, and Andy felt a trifle chilled as it reclosed on him and he was a prisoner.

"How do you do, Mr. Chase?" he said, as he recognized the lockup-keeper, an old grizzled man, who limped towards him.

"Got you, did they?" spoke the man. "Sorry, Andy."

"Yes, I am sorry, too, just at this time. Of course you know, I'm not the kind of a fellow to burn down a man's barn."

"Know it—guess I know. I can prove——" began Chase, so excitedly, that Andy stared at him in some wonder. "See here," continued Chase, controlling himself, "I've got something to say to you later on. Just for the present, you count on me as your friend. I'll see you get the best going in this dismal place."

"Thank you, Mr. Chase," said Andy.

"You needn't sleep in any cell. I'll let you have a cot in my room," continued Chase with earnestness and emotion. "Andy——" and there the speaker choked up, and he grasped Andy's hand, and turning away trembled all over. "You're a blessed good boy, and you've got a true friend in me, and remember what I tell you—

they will never find you guilty of burning down Jones' barn."

Andy returned the pressure of the hand of the man whom he was meeting under peculiar circumstances, feeling sure that his avowed friendship was genuine. He had good reason to believe this.

When Andy had come to Princeville, Chase was a worthless drunkard, who worked rarely and who was in the lockup most of the time. One winter's night, as Andy was returning from taking a customer to the lake, he lined a swampy stretch and noticed a huddled-up figure lying at its half-frozen edge.

Andy got out of the automobile and discovered a man, his body and clothes half frozen down into the reeds and grass. It was Chase, sodden with drink and fast perishing.

Andy managed to get the poor fellow in the tonneau and drove home. It was late, and Talbot had left the garage for the night. Andy dragged his helpless guest into his little den of a room and hurried for a doctor. He was a favorite with the physician, for whom he had done many little favors, and the latter worked over the half-frozen Chase for nearly two hours. He refused to think of taking any pay, and at Andy's request promised to say nothing about the incident.

Andy kept his little oil stove going all night and plied the patient with warm drinks. When morning came Chase was awake and sober, but he was so weak and full of pain he could hardly move.

All that day and into the next Andy managed to house and care for Chase without detection. Talbot finally discovered the intruder, however. He stormed fearfully. He was for at once sending for an officer and having Chase sent to jail or the workhouse.

Andy pleaded hard for the poor refugee. Talbot declared that his wet garments had spoiled the automobile cushions. Andy got Chase to agree that he would work this out when he got well, and Talbot was partly mollified.

When Chase got about he did some drudgery at Talbot's home. Then one day he came to tell Andy that Talbot had got him a position. Chase was well acquainted with prison ways. Talbot had quite some political influence, and the forlorn old wreck was installed as lockup-keeper at the town jail.

Once a week regularly he came to visit Andy at the garage. It was usually Saturday nights, after the others had gone home. Chase would bring along some dainty for Andy to cook, and they would have quite a congenial time. During all this time Chase never touched a drop of liquor.

He told Andy he had received the lesson of his life, leaving him crippled in one limb, and that he would show Andy his gratitude for his rescue by keeping the pledge.

"Mr. Chase," now said Andy, "there is something you can do for me, if you will."

"Speak it out, Andy," responded the lock-up keeper eagerly.

"I want to send a telegram to a friend right away. They have taken all my money from me, but the message can go collect."

Chase hobbled down the corridor rapidly to return with paper and pencil.

"Write out your message, Andy," he said. "I'll see that it goes without delay."

Andy wrote out a telegram to John Parks. It ran:

"Under arrest on a false charge. I want to see you on important business."

Chase took the message, put on his hat, and going to the barred door tapped on it.

The turnkey appeared and unlocked the door. As Chase passed out, Andy observed that someone passed into the cell room. It was Seth Talbot.

"I want a little talk with you, Andy Nelson," spoke the garage owner, "and it will pay you to listen to what I have to say."

CHAPTER XVI

BAIL WANTED

THE garage owner moved a few feet away from the grated door of the cell room and sat down on a bench. He beckoned to Andy.

"No, I'll stand up," said our hero.

"All right, I won't be long. Short and sweet is my motto. To begin with, Andy Nelson, I've been a second father to you."

"I never knew it," observed the boy.

"Don't get saucy," replied Talbot. "It don't show the right spirit. I gave you a job when you didn't have any, and took on myself a big responsibility—agreeing to look after you like a regular apprentice. What is the result? Ingratitude."

Andy was silent, but he looked at Talbot, marveling that the man, mean as he was, could imagine that he meant what he said.

"You've brought me lots of trouble," pursued Talbot in an aggrieved tone. "The worst of all

is that it's led to my son running away from home."

The speaker evidently thought that Andy knew all about this, while in reality Andy only guessed it.

"Oh, I'm responsible for that, too, am I?" observed Andy.

"Yes, you are. You left me in the lurch, and while Gus was off with a customer some one robbed the money drawer. I was mad and accused Gus of taking it. Gus got mad and left home."

"What did I have to do with that?"

"Why, if you'd stayed where you belonged it wouldn't have happened, would it?"

Andy actually laughed outright at this strange reasoning.

"What!" he cried. "Me, the firebug, me, the thief you accuse me of being!"

"Well, anyhow, you've been a lot of expense and trouble to me. Now you're in a hard fix. You are dead sure to go to the reformatory until you are twenty-one years of age, unless some one steps in and saves you."

"You think so, do you, Mr. Talbot?"

"I am certain of it."

"Who's going to step in and save me?" inquired Andy innocently.

"I'm the only man who can."

"Oh!"

"And I will, if you're willing to do your share."

"What is my share?" demanded Andy.

"Doing what I advise you. I'm a man of influence and power in this community," boasted the garage owner. "I can fix up this business all right with Jones. You've got to help, though."

"All right, name your terms," said Andy.

"I wouldn't put it 'terms,' Andy," replied Talbot, looking eager and insinuating, "call it rights. There's that two hundred dollars at the bank. It was found on my property by one of my hired employees. Good, that gives me legal possession according to law."

"Does it?" nodded Andy. "I didn't know that before."

"You can get that money by going after it," continued Talbot.

"How can I?"

"Why, that advertisement they found in your pocket says so, don't it? See here, Andy," and Talbot looked so mean and greedy that our hero could hardly keep from shuddering with disgust, "tell me about that advertisement—all about it. I want to be a good friend to you. I am a shrewd business man, and you're only a boy. They'll chisel you out of it, if you don't have some older person to stand by you. I'll stand by you, Andy."

"Chisel me out of what?" inquired Andy, in-

tent on drawing out his specious counsellor to the limit.

"What's your due. They're after the pocketbook that held the two hundred dollars. Don't you see they're breaking their necks to get it back? Why? aha!"

"That's so," murmured Andy, as if it were all news to him.

"So, if you know what became of that pocketbook——"

"Yes," nodded Andy.

"And where it is——"

"I do," declared Andy.

"Capital!" cried Talbot, getting excited. "Then we've got them. Ha! Ha! They can't squirm away from us. Where's the pocketbook, Andy? You just hand this business right over to me. I'll do the negotiating."

"And if I do?" insinuated Andy.

"You won't be prosecuted on this firebug charge. I'll take you back at the garage and raise your salary."

"How much?" inquired Andy.

"Well—I'll be liberal. I'll raise your wages twenty-five cents a week."

"Mr. Talbot, if you made it twenty-five dollars I wouldn't touch it, no, nor twenty-five hundred dollars. You talk about your goodness to me. Why, you treated me like a slave. As to the

two hundred dollars, it stays right where it is until its rightful owner claims it. If he then wants to give it to me as a reward, you can make up your mind you won't get a cent of it."

"You young reprobate!" shouted Talbot, jumping to his feet, aflame with rage. "I'll make you sing another tune soon. It rests with me as to your staying in jail. I'll just go and see those lawyers myself."

"You will waste your time," declared Andy. "I have told them all about you from beginning to end, and they're too smart to play into any of your dodges."

"We'll see! We'll see!" fumed the garage owner, as he went to the cell-room door and shook it to attract the attention of the turnkey. "I'll see you once more—just once more, mind you, and that's to-morrow morning. You'll decide then, or you'll have a hard run of it."

Andy was left to himself. He walked around the stout cell room with some curiosity. There were two other prisoners in jail. Both were locked up in cells. One of them asked Andy for a drink of water. The other was asleep on his cot.

A clang at the barred door attracted Andy's attention again, and he reached it as the turnkey shouted out in a tone that sounded very official:

"Andrew Nelson!"

He stood aside for Andy to step out. An officer Andy had not seen before took him by the arm and led him up two flights of stairs to a large courtroom.

It had no visitors, but the judge sat on the bench. Near him was the prosecuting attorney and the court clerk. Talbot occupied a chair, and conversing with him was Farmer Jones.

"We enter the appearance of the prisoner in this case, your honor," immediately spoke the attorney, as if in a hurry to get through with the formalities.

"Let the clerk enter the same," ordered the judge in an indifferent tone. "Take the prisoner before the grand jury when it convenes."

"In the matter of bail——" again spoke the attorney.

"Arson. A pretty serious offense," said the judge. "The prisoner is held over in bonds of two thousand dollars."

Andy's heart sank. He had heard and read of cases where generally a few hundred dollars bail was asked. He had even calculated in his mind how he could call friends to his assistance who would go his surety for a small amount, but two thousand dollars.

"How are you, Andy?" said Jones, advancing and looking him over critically. Andy was a trifle pale, but his bearing was manly, his countenance

open and honest. He was neatly dressed, and looked the energetic business boy all over, and evidently impressed the farmer that way.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Jones," he said respectfully.

"I suppose you feel a little hard agin' me, Andy, but I couldn't help it. That barn cost me eight hundred dollars."

"It was a serious loss, yes, sir," said Andy, "and I am sorry for you."

Jones fidgeted. Talbot was talking to the attorney, and the farmer seemed glad to get away from his company.

"See here, Andy," he said, edging a little nearer, "I've got boys of my own, and it makes me feel badly to see you in this fix."

"What did you place me here for, then?" demanded Andy.

"I—I thought—you see, Talbot had the evidence. He egged me on, so to speak. Honest and true, Andy, did you set fire to my barn?"

"Honest and true, Mr. Jones, I had no hand in it. Why should I? You have always been pleasant and good to me."

"Why, you see, I stopped you running away from Talbot that day."

"And you think I turned firebug out of spite? Oh, Mr. Jones!"

"H'm—see here, judge," and Jones moved up

to the desk. "I don't know that I care to prosecute this case."

"Out of your hands, Mr. Jones," snapped the prosecuting attorney sharply. "The case must go to the grand jury."

"Andy—I—I'll come and see you," said Jones, as the officer marched Andy back to the jail room.

"Two thousand dollars bail," ruminated Andy, once again under lock and key. "I can never hope to find anybody to get me out. Too bad—I'm out of the airship race for good."

CHAPTER XVII

A TRUE FRIEND

"ALL RIGHT, Andy."

"Did you send the telegram?"

"Yes, and paid for it, so there would be no delay."

"You needn't have done that."

"I wanted to be sure that it went double rush."

"All right, I will settle with you when they give me back my money."

Chase, the lockup-keeper, had promptly and willingly attended to the errand upon which Andy had sent him.

"See here, Andy," said Chase, "I understand they had you up in court."

"Yes," answered Andy, "they took me up to fix the bail."

"How much?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"Why!" exclaimed Chase, his face darkening, "that's an outrage."

"I think so, too."

"There's something behind it," muttered the lockup-keeper.

"Yes," returned Andy. "Mr. Talbot is behind it. He seems to stand in with the prosecuting attorney. Mr. Jones was quite willing to drop the case, and said that Mr. Talbot had egged him on."

Chase did not say any more just then, but as he strolled away, he muttered to himself in an excited manner. He busied himself about the place for the next hour. Then he showed Andy his own sleeping quarters, a quite comfortable, well-ventilated room, and set up an extra cot in it.

"You and I will have our meal in my room after I feed the other prisoners," he said. "I'll make it as easy for you as I can, Andy."

"I know you will, Mr. Chase," responded Andy heartily.

"I'll do a good deal for you," declared the faithful old fellow. "What do I care for this mean old job, anyway? Say," and he dropped his voice to a cautious whisper, "suppose there was a way for both of us to get out of here?"

"What do you mean?" queried Andy quickly.

"Just what I say. Suppose you and I could get to some place a long way off, where they couldn't trace us, could you get me another job, do you think?"

"Don't you like this one?"

"No, I don't. I despise it. I have to give Talbot half of my salary for getting it for me, and I'm tired of the jail."

"Do you mean to tell me that Talbot takes one half of your salary?" questioned Andy indignantly.

"I do."

"Then he's a meaner man than I thought he was. I can get you a much better job when I get free," said Andy, "and I'll do it, but you mustn't think of such nonsense as my escaping."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a sticker, and never ran away like a sneak in my life," declared Andy strenuously. "No, I'm going to face the music like a man."

Chase was silent for a while. Finally, evidently struggling with some new disturbing thought, he said:

"Sure you can get me a job, Andy?"

"I am."

"If I cut loose from here and make Talbot an enemy for life, you'll see to it that I get work?"

"As long as you keep sober, Mr. Chase, you can always get a position. You have made a brave start. Now brace up, think something of yourself, and earn a comfortable living."

"I'll do it!" cried Chase. "I'll risk everything.

"Andy, you didn't fire that barn. Do you know who did?"

"I have a suspicion," replied Andy.

"If I guess right who you suspect, will you nod your head?"

"Yes."

"It was Gus Talbot and Dale Billings."

Andy nodded his head. He started slightly as he did so, wondering at the sturdy declaration of Chase. Then he asked:

"Why do you think so, Mr. Chase?"

"I don't think, I know," declared the lockup-keeper.

"Did you see them do it?"

"No, I didn't, but—see here, Andy, I've nothing more to say."

"Why not?"

"I want to find an old tramp named Wandering Dick, before I go any farther."

"Does he know?"

"I'll not say another word except this: they'll never prove you a firebug, and old Talbot will be sorry for the day he stirred things up and started out to persecute an honest boy. Drat the varmint! I'll be afraid of him no longer. Andy, you are a good friend."

"I try to be, Mr. Chase."

"I'll prove that I am to you."

Chase refused to say another word. Andy curiously watched him stump around attending to his duties. The old fellow would scowl and mutter, and Andy believed he was mentally discussing Talbot. Then he would chuckle, and Andy decided he was thinking something pleasant about himself.

Chase appeared to have entire charge of the cell room. At five o'clock in the afternoon he let the other prisoners out in the corridor for exercise, and at six o'clock he gave them their supper in their cells. Then he and Andy adjourned to the little room beyond the cells and had a hearty, appetizing meal.

Chase supplied Andy with some newspapers, and later they played a game of checkers. About nine o'clock a prisoner was brought in and locked up.

At ten o'clock, just as Andy was going to bed, the turnkey's ponderous key rattled at the barred door, and again his voice rang out:

"Andrew Nelson!"

"Wonder who wants me now?" said Andy.

"Somebody to see you in the sheriff's room," said the turnkey, "follow me."

Andy did so. As they entered the apartment indicated, a man with one arm in a sling advanced and grasped Andy's hand warmly.

"This is a blazing shame!" he burst out, "but

I'll have you out of here if it takes all I've got and can beg or borrow."

It was Andy's employer, John Parks, the Airship King.

CHAPTER XVIII

OUT ON BAIL

ANDY'S heart warmed up and he felt that the tide was turning. Parks was an energetic, impulsive man, and generally put through what he started at. His hearty greeting showed what he thought of Andy and the charge against him.

"Is that the sheriff coming?" he demanded impatiently of the officer or guard at the door of the room.

"He'll be here soon," was the reply, "we have sent for him."

"Come over here, Andy," directed the aeronaut, leading the way to a corner of the apartment so the others could not overhear their conversation. "I want to talk with you. Now then," he continued, as they were seated by themselves, "tell me the whole story."

"I wish I had done it before," began Andy, and then he recited his experience with Talbot and the details of the barn burning.

"Guesswork and spitework, eh? The whole

business," flared out Parks. "They haven't a foot to stand on in court. I'll see that you have the right kind of a lawyer when the case comes to trial. All I am anxious about is to get you back to camp double quick. You know the race takes place day after to-morrow."

"Yes, I know it only too well," replied Andy; "I've worried enough about it."

"Here comes my man, I guess," interrupted Parks, as a portly consequential-looking person entered the room.

"I wanted to see you about this young man," explained Parks. "They've shut him up here on a false charge, and I want to get him out. He's a trusted employee of mine, and I need him badly in my business."

"You want to give bail, do you?" inquired the sheriff.

"Every dollar I've got, judge," responded the aeronaut with emphasis, "so long as he gets free."

"The bail is two thousand dollars, and I suppose you know the bondsman must qualify as a real estate owner in the county."

"I'm not that, judge," said Parks, "but I've got some money." He pulled out a roll of bills. "I've got nigh onto one thousand dollars personal property, and I'm going to earn the aviation prize down at Montrose day after to-morrow."

"Considerably up in the air, part of your sched-

ule, eh?" remarked the sheriff, smiling, "I'm afraid we can't accept you as a bondsman. Residence here as a real estate owner is absolutely necessary."

"Why, do you think I would leave you in the lurch or a boy like Andy sneak away. No sir-ree! You can trust me, Mr. Sheriff."

"I don't doubt that, but the law is very strict."

Parks paced the floor excitedly. He looked disappointed and bothered.

"I've got to do something—Andy has just got to be at the aviation meet day after to-morrow. I've got it! Say, suppose I could line up two thousand dollars through friends, in cash, mind you, couldn't I hire some man in Princeville to go on the bond?"

"It is very often done," acknowledged the sheriff.

"Then I'll do it. Andy, I'll be back here to-morrow. Mr. Sheriff, you can fix the papers for quick action. I'll raise that two thousand dollars if I have to mortgage everything I've got. I've got some friends and I own a farm out West."

"Just a word, Mr. Parks," said Andy.

"What is it, lad?" inquired the aeronaut.

"I wish you would get word to a lawyer at Greenville, a Mr. West, about something. He expected to see me yesterday, and I was arrested before I could get to him."

Andy explained about the advertisement and the lost pocketbook. Mr. Parks was very much impressed and interested over his story.

"Why, Andy," he commented vigorously. "There's something strange about all this."

"There is probably something very important for the man who lost the pocketbook," said Andy. "I don't want the lawyer to think I fooled him."

"Can you find the pocketbook, Andy?"

"Unless it has been removed from the place where it was three weeks ago, I am sure that I can."

"H-m, this sets me thinking," observed Parks. "I'll see that the lawyer gets the message, Andy. I'll be back here to-morrow."

"Mr. Parks," said Andy seriously, "I don't think you had better try to raise the money. It will be harder than you think, and all this will take up your time and attention away from the airship race."

"There won't be any airship race for me if you are out of it, will there?" demanded Parks.

"Why not? You can surely find someone to take my place. It's the *Racing Star* that is going to win the race, not the man at the lever. He's got to keep his eyes open, but the machine is so far ahead of anything I've seen, that a careful, active pilot can hardly fail to win."

Parks looked dubious and unconvinced.

"I'm going to get you out of here," he maintained stubbornly, and, knowing the determined character of his employer, Andy went back to the lockup believing that he would keep his word.

"What's the news, Andy?" inquired Chase eagerly.

"The best in the world, Mr. Chase," replied Andy brightly.

"Are they going to let you out?"

"I hope so, soon."

Andy had told Chase something about his circumstances, and now told him more, mentioning the airship race.

"I say, you shouldn't miss that, should you, Andy?" excitedly proclaimed Chase. "I wish I could help you. I can in time. I have a good mind——"

Chase paused mysteriously, and began stumping about in his usual abstracted, muttering way.

Andy sat down on a bench as there was a movement at the cell-room door.

"Here, give this man shelter for the night and something to eat," ordered the turnkey. "Turn him out in the morning."

"Hello!" spoke Chase, evidently recognizing a regular habitue of the place, "it's you again, is it?"

"On my rounds, as usual," grinned the newcomer, a harmless-looking, trampish fellow.

"Been in some other lockup, I suppose, since we saw you last?" insinuated Chase.

"No, Wandering Dick and I have been following a show. You see——"

"Who? Say that again," interrupted Chase excitedly.

"Wandering Dick."

"Where is he now?"

"Three days ago I left him about fifty miles south of here."

"Is he there now?"

"I think so. The show broke up and that threw me out, but Dick talked about staying around Linterville till he could panhandle it south for the winter."

"See here," said Chase, drawing out his pocketbook. "There's a ten-dollar bill," and he flipped over some bank notes.

"I see there is," nodded the tramp wonderingly.

"I'll start you out with a good breakfast and that money in the morning. I want you to find Dick, bring him here, and I'll give you each as much more money when you do."

The tramp looked puzzled, then suspicious, and then alarmed.

"See here," he said, "what are you going to work on us, same old charge?"

"Not at all. I want Dick to answer a half

dozen questions, that's all, and then you are both free to go."

"Say, let me start to-night!" said the tramp eagerly.

"No, it's too late," replied Chase. "There's no train until morning."

Andy had overheard all this conversation. Wandering Dick was the name he had heard Chase speak once before, and he had coupled it with the suggestion that in some way Wandering Dick was concerned in the incident of Farmer Jones' burned-down barn.

Andy slept in a good bed and got up early in the morning, believing that the new day would bring some developments of importance in the situation.

The tramp was started off by Chase, breakfast was over, and Chase had been let out by the turnkey into the main room. He came rushing back in a few minutes carrying an armful of towels for jail use.

"Andy," he chuckled, throwing his load recklessly on a bench and slapping his young friend gleefully on the shoulder, "You're free!"

CHAPTER XIX

A DISAPPOINTMENT

ANDY was led into the office of the jail and up to the desk of the official who had registered his name the day before. This man opened a drawer and pushed a package before Andy and a receipt.

"See if your money is all right," he directed, "and sign that receipt."

"Going to give them back to me, are you?" said Andy brightly, feeling delighted at recovering his liberty. "They must have found out that I am innocent."

"H-m! that's to be determined later on."

Andy looked questioningly about the room. Who had set him free? What did it mean? Just then he caught the sound of voices in another room and the officer pointed to it.

"Your friend is in there," he said. "He's waiting for you."

Andy felt as if he had wings on his feet. His heart was overflowing with gladness. He crossed

the threshold of the doorway the officer had indicated, looked in, and then stood stock still, very much surprised.

"Well, young man, we've reached you at last?" spoke a hearty voice.

"Why, it's Mr. Webb!" exclaimed Andy.

He had at once recognized the gentleman whom he had driven over in the automobile from Princeville to Macon, the day when all his troubles in life seemed to have begun.

With Mr. Webb was a man who nodded pleasantly but curiously to Andy. This was Joshua Bird. He was reported to be the richest man in Princeville, and dealt principally in real estate and had the reputation of being something of a miser.

Mr. Webb, holding Andy's hand, turned to Mr. Bird.

"Well, sir, everything is satisfactory?" he asked.

"Entirely so," answered Bird. "You're putting a good deal of faith in a lad you scarcely know, though."

"I'll bank on my confidence," answered Mr. Webb. "Nelson, you remember me, do you not?"

"Perfectly, sir, but I don't understand."

"My being here?" questioned Mr. Webb. "A purely selfish motive is at the bottom of it, I am free to confess, although I am glad to be of

service to you on general principles. Are you ready to leave here at once?"

"Where for, sir?"

"An automobile dash across the country."

"And then am I to return here?"

"Not until your trial comes on. Let me explain, so you will understand the situation. I have gone on your bail bond."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Andy gratefully.

"Your friend, Mr. Parks, found me late last night at Greenville, where Mr. West and myself were anxiously awaiting you. He explained about your arrest, and told us the whole story of your affairs. It seems that your trouble began with the finding of my pocketbook. It was only right, therefore, that I should stand by you—which I have done, and intend to keep up, Andy, for you have proven yourself a good, honest boy."

"Thank you, Mr. Webb," said our hero with considerable emotion.

"Mr. West, my legal adviser, arranged with Mr. Bird, who has just left us. The signing of your bail bond is the result. You are free to get to those anxious friends of yours at the aviation meet, but first I want you to take a little trip with me."

"After that old leather pocketbook, I suppose."

"You've guessed it right, Andy."

"I would like to speak with a good friend of mine in the jail here for a moment," said Andy, "and then I will be ready to go with you."

"All right, Andy."

Chase had already heard the good news and congratulated Andy, chuckling and hobbling about at a great rate.

"Remember you're to look out for a new job for me," he intimated.

"I'll attend to that all right, Mr. Chase," promised Andy. "If things go as I think they will, I have a friend as well as an employer who will probably need a man such as you to potter about and look after things."

"Andy, I'll potter for keeps if you get me that situation," declared the old lockup-keeper earnestly. "You get it fixed for me, and when your trial comes up, I'll show you how much I think of you."

"Things are certainly coming out famously right," chirped Andy gaily, as he left Chase.

"Now then, Nelson, take a try at my new machine," said Mr. Webster, as he led Andy to the street.

Seth Talbot, one of his own machines waiting at the curb for a fare, was strolling around inspecting the beautiful touring car which Mr. Webb had indicated.

"Eh, hey! what's this?" he blubbered out, as

Andy walked smartly to the machine and leaped into the driver's seat.

An officer who was aware of the situation nudged Talbot and spoke a few quick words to him in an undertone. The face of the garage owner turned white with astonishment and malice. Mr. Webb had noticed him, and asked Andy:

"Who is that man?"

"Mr. Talbot, my old employer," responded Andy.

"I don't like his looks," spoke Mr. Webb simply. "Now then, Nelson, of course you know where I want to go."

"After the leather pocketbook—yes, sir."

"I hope you can find it."

"I feel sure we shall, sir. We will have to take some roundabout roads to get to the farm I told Mr. West about."

"This is a very important matter to me," explained Mr. Webb. "I may as well tell you, Nelson, that the fortune and happiness of two orphan children, distant relatives of mine, depend on the finding of that old pocketbook."

"I am very much interested, Mr. Webb," said Andy.

"You did not notice perhaps, but glued down in the big part of that pocketbook is a thin compartment. Secreted in that is an old time-worn

sheet of paper that I spent thousands of dollars and a year's time in locating and getting into my possession. I was on my way to my lawyer with it, and had placed two hundred dollars in the pocketbook for costs in the law suit, when I lost the pocketbook, as you know."

"I never dreamed there was any value in the old pocketbook," said Andy. "I knew it was in my old clothes which I threw away at a farm near Wade, I told you about. I remember perfectly well tossing them up on an old shelf. Unless they have been disturbed, we will find the clothes and the pocketbook. It was a regular old rubbish pile where I tossed them, and out of anybody's way."

"I shall feel immensely relieved and glad when I find that document," declared Mr. Webb, with a sigh of anxiety.

John Parks was responsible for bringing the word to Mr. West that had sent Mr. Webb to Princeville. The aeronaut had told the lawyer considerable about Andy and the approaching airship race, and as they rolled along Mr. Webb showed a great deal of interest in Andy's aviation ambitions and asked a great many questions.

"I shall want to see you again as soon as I get that document in the pocketbook to the lawyers," said the gentleman. "The airship race is to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will keep track of you through Mr. Parks, and probably meet you day after to-morrow. I hope you win the race, Nelson, and get the prize. You deserve it, my boy. If you fail, do not get discouraged. You have some good friends, and I am one of them."

"You have shown that," said Andy with feeling. "I wouldn't have missed the race for a good deal."

Andy entertained his companion considerably by a recital of his adventures three weeks previously when he had helped the goose farmer get his product to market.

"Just yonder is where I met him first," explained Andy, as they passed over a bridge crossing the river. "It's a straight road to the Collins farm now, but not very even."

"I hope we find things as you expect," said Mr. Webb.

"I think we will," answered Andy cheerfully.

It was about an hour later when they rounded a curve in a beautiful country road.

"Just beyond that grove of trees," said Andy, "and we come in full view of the Collins farmhouse. Now we can see it—Why, I—don't—understand—this."

Andy slowed down in speech, with a series of

wondering gasps, as he likewise slowed down the machine.

"Why, what's the matter, Nelson?" queried Mr. Webb.

"Don't you see?" began Andy. "No, you don't see, and that's just it. There's something wrong. The farmhouse did stand right over where that gravelled road runs into the farm, and now——"

"Nelson," interrupted Mr. Webb almost sharply, "there has been a fire here."

Andy stared dubiously, but in great concern. There could be no doubt of it, this was the site of the Collins' farm. There were the white-washed posts where the farm road began, the horse block where he bade the goose farmer good-by, but the farmhouse itself had disappeared.

CHAPTER XX

A NEW CAPTIVITY

"NELSON, could you possibly be mistaken?"

"No, sir, positively not."

Andy had come to a dead stop with the automobile. He stared blankly at the prospect before them. The site of the Collins farmhouse was a flat stretch of waste and ruin. Grass, weeds, trees, fences showed the ravages of a great fire.

Mr. Webb looked dreadfully disappointed. His face had become almost pale. Andy shared his disquietude, but he could simply say:

"I am very sorry."

"You did all you could, Nelson," responded his companion. "Here comes some one. We will question him a little."

A farm laborer with a hoe across his shoulder sauntered down the road. Andy hailed him. As he came nearer to them Mr. Webb said:

"My man, what has been happening around here?"

"Don't you see?" queried the man, with a comprehensive wave of his hand across the bleak ruins. "Fire."

"This is the Collins farm, isn't it?"

"It was," answered the man. "The fire took them in the night a week ago."

"And burned everything about the place?"

"Down to the pig styes."

"Where are the Collins people?"

"Gone over into Bowen County until they can arrange to build again."

"Start up, Nelson," ordered Mr. Webb. "It's a waste of time to loiter around here."

Mr. Webb felt cruelly disappointed. Andy saw this and was sorry for him. He glanced at the spot where he remembered the old shed to have stood. Even the tree that had sheltered it had burned to a crisp.

"Where am I to go?" inquired Andy.

"You had better strike for Rushville," replied Mr. Webb. "From what I remember, you can get a train to Montrose earlier than on the Central."

"I am to go on to John Parks?"

"That's the programme," said Mr. Webb, trying to appear cheerful; "why not?"

Andy reflected seriously for a moment or two. Finally he spoke:

"Mr. Webb," he said; "I hardly feel right to

leave you on my bond for that big amount. Something might happen so that I could not appear for trial—trickery, or a dozen things."

"And because you have not succeeded in recovering that pocketbook, you suppose I'm going to desert you, Nelson?" inquired the gentleman.

"You are not the man to do a single mean thing," replied Andy, "but, with all your troubles, and me being a stranger——"

"Drop it, Nelson. You have tried to be the best friend in the world to me, and I'd go on your bond for double the amount I have. You are to go straight on to Montrose, win that airship race, and when you have got that off your mind we will have a talk together."

"You are a good, kind man," said Andy, with fervor, "and I'd walk barefooted on hot coals to get you back that pocketbook."

When they reached Rushville, Mr. Webb took charge of the automobile. He made many encouraging references to the coming airship race, and when he left Andy at the railroad station shook his hand in a friendly way.

Andy made a disappointing discovery as soon as he consulted the train schedules. A change in the service of the road had been made only that week, and there was no train south until seven o'clock. It was now three, and he would have to wait four hours.

"I won't be able to get home until after dark," reflected the lad. "I hoped to have an hour or two of daylight for practice, but this knocks my plans awry. Well, as it is, this is a good deal better than missing the race altogether."

It was quite dark when the train reached the limits of Montrose. It stopped at a crossing, and Andy got off and made a short cut for the Parks camp.

His course led him past the large aviation field. Andy was anxious to report to Mr. Parks as soon as possible, but unusual light and animation about the big enclosure aroused his curiosity and interest, and he passed the gate and strolled by the various aerodromes.

Everything was "the race!" Groups were discussing it, contestants were oiling up their machines and exploiting the merits of the others. An hour passed by before Andy realized it. He came to halt in front of the last tent in the row, turned to retrace his steps, and then suddenly halted.

"I'd like to know what the Duske crowd is about," he reflected, glancing towards the isolated camp which he had surreptitiously visited only a few nights previous. "Mr. Parks might be glad to know, too. I'll do a little skirmishing and find out what I can."

Andy crossed a dark space. Lights were mov-

ing about the Duske camp, and these served as a guide. He neared the fence surrounding the camp, got over it, and cautiously approached the large tent which held the airship he had inspected on his first stealthy visit to the place.

Suddenly Andy tripped and fell. His foot had caught in a wire stretched taut under the grass. As he went headlong across the grass, a bell began to jingle, and he realized that the wire was one of many probably set to trap intruders. At all events, before he could get to his feet two men ran out of the tent.

One of these was Duske. The other was his companion of the evening when Andy had previously visited the place. They pounced on him promptly.

"Another spy," spoke Duske, dragging the captive toward the tent.

"They're getting thick," observed his companion. "Those fellows at the big camp are mighty curious to pry into the secrets of our craft here. Hello! why, Duske, this is the same fellow we caught snooping around here three nights since."

"Eh? Oh, it's you again, is it?"

They had come inside the tent. The light burning there revealed Andy fully. Without letting go of him Duske scowlingly surveyed his captive.

"Say, Duske," spoke the other man quickly,

"it's Parks' boy, and he's the one who won the pony prize."

"Was that you?" demanded Duske; "are you Andy Nelson?"

"Suppose so?" queried Andy.

"Then you're the fellow who is going to take Parks' place in the race to-morrow?"

"I guess that is right," affirmed Andy.

"No," cried Duske, showing his teeth, and looking fierce and malicious, "it's wrong, dead wrong, as you're going to find out. Fetch me some rope."

"Hold on," objected Andy, "you aren't going to tie me up?"

He put up a manful struggle and very nearly got away. The two powerful men were more than his equal, however, and in a very few minutes Andy found himself tied hand and foot.

Duske and his companion carried him bodily along through the tent, past the flying machine, and threw him onto a mattress lying on the ground in a small compartment partitioned off with canvas. Duske tested the ropes that bound Andy, gave them another twist, and went out into the main tent.

"This looks like luck," observed the companion of Duske.

"Yes, if we've got the bearings right," replied

the other. "Are you sure he was scheduled to take Parks' place in the race?"

"Of course I am. Hasn't Tyrrell told us already about his getting into trouble somewhere, and couldn't be here to make the race? Hasn't Parks hired Tyrrell in his place?"

"Then how comes the boy to be here? I don't like the looks of things at all."

"Tyrrell will be here before long. He can post us if there is any break in our arrangements."

The two men passed out of hearing. Andy made one or two efforts to loosen his bonds, found them unusually secure, and gave up the experiment. What his captors had said startled and disturbed him considerably.

"Mr. Parks doesn't expect me to show up in time to make the race, and this man they talked about, Tyrrell, is going to take my place," reflected Andy. "He is a friend of the people here, and that certainly means harm for Mr. Parks."

Andy worried himself a good deal during the next hour, imagining all kinds of plots on the part of Duske and his friends to prevent the *Racing Star* from winning the prize.

Finally Andy heard voices in the large tent. His name was spoken, and he listened intently to catch what was said.

"If that's so, and it's really Andy Nelson,"

sounded a new voice, "it's funny, for up to this morning he was in jail at Princeville."

"Then he's escaped, or got free somehow," answered Duske. "He's that boy of Parks' who was the winner in the dash for the pony prize."

"If he is," came the reply, "you want to hold him a close prisoner till the big race is over."

CHAPTER XXI

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE voices that Andy heard died away in the distance. In about ten minutes, however, they came back again within his range of hearing. The man he believed to be Tyrrell, who in some way had induced Mr. Parks to accept him as a substitute for himself in the aviation race, was speaking to his companion, who was Duske.

"That's the programme, is it?" he was asking.

"To a T."

"You will look out for the Nelson boy."

"Don't fret on that score. We'll cage him safe and sound until the race is over."

"You think I had better use the bottle?"

"Yes, here it is. Stow it anywhere in your clothes."

"Isn't there some easier way? What's the use of fire? It may strike investigators as suspicious."

"Not at all. They tanked you too full, a spark did the mischief, see? You know enough to descend in among some trees?"

"Of course."

"Let the flame singe your clothing, tell some sensational story of a hairbreadth escape, and you'll be quite a hero."

"You think with the *Racing Star* out of the way that your machine is bound to win, do you?"

"I know it," affirmed Duske confidently. "Those other aeroplanes are mere botches. They will do as playthings, but as to distance, they're not in it with the *Moon Bird*."

"All right, I'll follow instructions. Keep that boy safe. I'd better go. It would be all up with our scheme if Parks should suspect I was your friend."

Andy fairly writhed where he lay. The plot of the villains was now perfectly clear to him. The man Tyrell had wormed himself into the confidence of Mr. Parks, who little suspected that he was a confederate of Duske. Tyrrell was to make the start with the *Racing Star,* pretend that an accident had happened, and burn up the airship.

"What shall I do—what can I do?" breathed Andy. "They don't intend to let me go until after the race is over to-morrow."

In about an hour Duske and an old man who seemed to be the cook of the camp came to where Andy lay. Duske released one hand of the captive. The anxious prisoner did not feel much

like eating, but he realized that he must keep up his strength. He ate some bread and meat which the cook brought, and drank some water.

Duske tied him up again, tighter than ever. Then he spoke to the cook:

"You get your armchair right outside the canvas flap here, Dobbins."

"All right, Mr. Duske," replied the man.

"Every fifteen minutes, right through till morning, you are to look in on that boy. See that he is comfortable, but particularly that he is safe."

"I'll attend to it."

"If you let him get away, you're out of a job, remember."

The cook followed out the programme directed by Duske to the minutest detail. Andy had no opportunity to free himself—he was watched so closely. He decided that the effort would be futile. Until midnight he lay wide awake, nervous and worried. Then he made up his mind that it did no good to fret, and got some sleep.

He was given his breakfast about six o'clock in the morning. Then he was tied up again and left to himself. He lay on the mattress so that when the wind blew the canvas lifted and he could look out. He was faced away from the direction of the aviation field, however, and twenty feet away the fence stared him blankly in the face.

From sounds near by and in the distance during

the next two hours, Andy could figure out just what was going on about him. The *Moon Bird* was carried from its aerodrome and taken to the aviation field. The old cook seemed to be left in possession of the camp. He looked in on Andy every so often. The rest of the time he was busy in the larger tent or outside of it with his cooking utensils.

Poor Andy was in sore straits of despair. He had a vivid imagination, and could fancy all that was shut out from his view by captivity. He heard a distant town bell strike nine o'clock.

"In an hour the airships will be off," soliloquized the captive mournfully, "and I won't be there."

Andy pictured in his mind all that was going on at the aviation field. He could fancy the airships ranging in place for the start. He could imagine the animation and excitement permeating the groups of spectators. He shut his eyes and tried to forget it all, so keen was his disappointment.

He heard the band strike up a gay tune. Then a gun was fired. Andy almost shed tears. In twenty minutes the starting signal was due.

"They'll have a head wind," he ruminated, as the breeze lifted the canvas at the side of the mattress upon which he lay. "It will be light, though, and won't hinder much;" and then he thrilled, as

he fancied himself seated in the operator's stand of the splendid *Racing Star,* awaiting the final word, "Go!"

Andy stared blankly at the fence of the enclosure of the Duske camp. A section of it had been broken down, and the gate left open in removing the airship. Of a sudden he stared eagerly. Some one had come into the enclosure.

The intruder was evidently some casual sightseer, a boy. His hands were in his pockets, and he strolled about as if curiously inspecting everything that came under his notice. He cast a careless glance at the tent, and was proceeding on his way towards the main aviation field, when Andy gave a great start.

"Silas—Silas Pierce!" he shouted, ignoring discovery by the cook.

Andy's heart was thumping like a trip-hammer. It seemed as if on the verge of the blackest despair a bright star of hope had risen on the horizon. He had recognized the intruder with surprise, but with gladness as well.

It was his companion of the goose trip, the son of Mr. Pierce—the farmer Silas—whom Andy had last seen at the Collins place, the farm he had visited the day previous. Silas wore a brand-new suit of clothes. He suggested the typical country boy, with some loose cash in his pocket, enjoying a brief holiday to the utmost.

"Hey!" exclaimed Silas, with a startled jump, his eyes goggling all about, and unable to trace the source of the challenge.

Andy uttered a groan. At the moment the breeze let down, and the canvas dropped, shutting him in and Silas out. Then a puff of wind came and lifted the flap again.

"Here, here, Silas!" called out Andy in tones of strained suspense. "Quick—help!"

"I vum!" gasped the farmer boy, staring blankly at what he saw of Andy. "Who is it? And—I say, you're dad's great friend, the Nelson boy!"

Silas had advanced, and took in the situation, and recognized Andy slowly.

"Lift up the canvas; come in here," directed Andy in a more cautious tone of voice. "You remember me, don't you?"

"Guess I do; but what in the world of wonder is the matter with you?"

"Don't talk so loud," pleaded Andy anxiously, fearing the arrival of the cook at any moment. "Some bad men have tied me up. Have you got a knife?"

"Yes; and a brand-new one. Won it in a funny game where you throw rings. See there," and with great pride Silas produced and opened a gaudily-handled jack-knife.

"Oh, thank you, Silas; I'll never forget this."

"Hold on! Say! Thunder! Is he crazy? Stop! Stop!"

In profound excitement, Silas Pierce regarded Andy. The minute he had cut the bonds of the young aviator, Andy had bounded to his feet as if set on springs. Afar from the aviation field there boomed out the second, the get-ready gun.

"Ten minutes!" gasped Andy, on fire with resolve. "I've got to make it."

He swept aside the canvas, headed in the direction of the main camp. Hot on his heels came his amazed rescuer, now a wondering pursuer. Andy ran at the fence, gave a spring, and cleared its top in a graceful leap. Silas, more clumsy, ran at two loose boards, and by sheer force of his might and strength, sent them out of place and put after Andy.

"Nelson!" he bawled. "What's the matter? Nobody's following you. Crickey, but you're a sprinter!"

"I'll see you later—Parks' camp—in a hurry."

In a hurry, indeed, was Andy. He was running against time. As a turn past some tents brought him in full sight of the open field, he was a lone heroic figure—heart, brain and body strained to reach the dainty, natty *Racing Star,* just being wheeled in place for flight.

There were seven airships entered for the race. These were now stationed a distance of several

hundred yards apart, ready to start. The spectators were held back from the dead line by ropes stretched from post to post, but Andy was coming across the field from its inside edge. Silas Pierce was putting after him, puzzled and excited, breathless, and far to the rear. Their unconventional arrival attracted no attention, for those in charge of the airships were engrossed in seeing that everything was right for the start.

The *Racing Star* was being pushed forward to its starting position. All the others were in place. In a swift glance, Andy made out the *Moon Bird,* and recognized Duske seated amidships.

Near the *Racing Star* was Mr. Parks, directing affairs, and Scipio was standing near by. At one side were Mr. Morse and Tsilsuma, deeply interested in the manœuvres going on.

"It's Tyrrell!" panted Andy, and he redoubled his speed as he made out the treacherous ally of Duske. Tyrrell was arrayed in leather jacket and gloves, keeping pace with the *Racing Star* as it moved along. As the airship came to a halt on the starting line, Andy saw him move forward to take his seat amidships.

It was then that Andy massed all his strength of being, accompanied by animated gesticulations, as he shouted out:

"Stop that man!"

CHAPTER XXII

"GO!"

"ANDY!" shouted John Parks in a transport of amazement.

"It's me," panted Andy, running up to his employer and pointing at Tyrrell. "Mr. Parks, stop that man. He's a traitor; he's a villain!"

Tyrrell had heard and seen Andy. He gave a great start. Then he made a move as if to hasten aboard the airship and get out of his way. Mr. Morse and the Japanese hastened forward. The men guiding the aeroplane stared hard at the newcomer.

"Andy, what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Parks, lost in wonderment.

"Just what I say. Don't let him get aboard."

"Hold on, Tyrrell," ordered the aeronaut.

"We'll lose the start," spoke Tyrrell hurriedly. "Don't you get aboard."

"No, sah; yo' just obey Mistah Parks, suh," interposed Scipio, laying a great hindering hand on the arm of Tyrrell.

"I have been a prisoner in the Duske camp since yesterday," explained Andy, catching his breath. "This man Tyrrell came there last night. He is in the employ of Duske."

"What!" shouted Parks, his face growing dark.

"It's true, Mr. Parks," asseverated Andy. "They are in a plot to burn the *Racing Star* and have you lose the prize."

"Do you hear what this boy says?" thundered the aeronaut, moving down on Tyrrell with threatening mien.

"It's—it's not true," declared Tyrrell, but turning pale, shrinking back, and looking about him for a chance to run.

"If you don't believe me," cried Andy, "search him."

Scipio held Tyrrell's arm in a viselike clasp. Parks ran his hand over his clothing. He drew from his pocket a parcel done up in a handkerchief. Mr. Morse took it, opened it, and revealed a bottle filled with some substance like kerosene, a small box of matches and some lint. Quick as a flash the hand of the aeronaut shot out for the throat of Tyrrell.

"You treacherous scoundrel!" he shouted.

Boom!

"The third gun! They're off, Mr. Parks, cried Andy. "Oh, don't let the *Racing Star* miss it."

"What can I do?"

"Send me. Men, get ready. Mr. Parks, I'll win this race!"

Andy was in no trim physically or in attire to attempt the race. At a glance the aeronaut saw this. But our hero was irresistible. He ran towards the machine, and with nimble movements he glided among the planes and reached the operator's seat. Already the other airships were sailing skywards.

"Go!" shouted Andy.

Upon the operator's seat lay the skull cap and goggles, ready for Tyrrell, and Andy hastily donned them. He heard the voice of Parks, now as excited as himself, giving orders, a tacit consent to make the start.

There was a run of scarcely a hundred feet along the grass. Andy placed a firm hand on the wheel. Then came a series of curves and sweeping arcs, which kept the crowd of spectators turning first one way and then the other in entranced silence.

The young aviator followed the popping of the motors of the contestant machines. One was fast becoming a mere speck in the sky.

"The *Moon Bird,* Duske's machine," murmured Andy.

It seemed poised in the air without motion, so direct was its course, so true its mechanism. Two of the other airships had already descended, one

of them wrecked and out of the race. The forty-foot mechanical bird, the Duske machine, however, had made the lead and kept it.

The climax came in Andy's preliminary ascent. Now the *Racing Star,* light and dainty as a lark, mounted with amazing speed. A glance at three of the airships convinced Andy that they were too faulty to make a record. The *Moon Bird,* however, was a marvel. From what he had heard Mr. Parks say, Duske had been an expert balloonist, and he now showed amazing ability in the aviation line. He seemed to be putting the stolen airship idea to marked advantage.

Andy struck a level about fifteen hundred feet in the air. There was a head wind, but it was not strong. Andy put on fine speed gradually. The *Racing Star* passed two of the contestants, and, fully in action, he drove keen on the trail of the *Moon Bird.*

The train that acted as a pilot with an American flag on its last car, Andy kept in view as a guide. When they came to Lake Clear, the *Moon Bird* did not follow the rounding land course, nor did Andy. Lake Clear was a shallow body of water, but of considerable extent, and dotted here and there with little islands.

Suddenly the *Moon Bird,* a machine of good utility, but, as Andy knew, of little lasting power, made a decided spurt, passed the *Racing Star,*

and at a distance of half a mile got fairly abreast of the lake. It was here that Duske met his Waterloo. Hitherto he had maintained practically a steady course. More than once Andy had got near enough to this rival to hear the loud gasping of the tube exhausts drown out the sharp chug-chug of the motor. Suddenly Duske made a sharp turn.

An appalling climax followed. In consternation and suspense Andy watched aerial evolutions that fairly dizzied him.

"He is lost!" breathed Andy, a-thrill.

In an instant he recalled what Mr. Morse had told him of the unfinished model that Duske and his crowd had stolen from him. The inventor had explained to Andy that while the suction principle involved in the rudder construction was unique and bound to increase speed, there should have been added automatic caps to close the rear ends of the suction tubes where a curve was attempted.

Of this Duske evidently knew nothing. The moment he turned the machine, however, there was a whirl. The aeroplane described a dive, then a somersault. Its lateral planes collapsed, and, tipping from side to side, it began to descend with frightful velocity.

Once it half righted, balanced, went over again, and, fifty feet from the ground, shot clear of a

little islet, and went down in the water of the lake, a wreck, first spilling Duske out.

"He is killed or stunned!" exclaimed Andy.

The boy aviator saw the other airships forging ahead, indifferent to the accident. Minutes counted in the sixty-mile race to Springfield and back to the starting point, but Andy was humane. He saw clearly that, if alive, the half-submerged Duske would be suffocated in a few minutes' time.

"I can't leave him to die," murmured Andy, and sent the *Racing Star* on a sharp slant, landing on the island.

Andy was soon out of the airship. He waded to the spot where Duske lay, and dragged him bodily up on dry land. As he turned him on his face, Andy knew from its purple hue, the lifeless limbs and choked gasps of the man, that another minute in the water would have been his last.

A boat put out from the mainland where a crowd of spectators was watching the race. Four men jumped out as the island was reached.

"Take care of this man," ordered Andy.

"You're a pretty fair fellow to risk losing the race to save a competitor," spoke one of the men heartily.

He and his companions followed Andy's instructions the best they could in starting the *Racing Star,* and Andy shot skywards again, making up for lost time.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT RACE

"HURRAH!"

"Why, it's only a boy!"

"Parks' man—get your rest, lad, while we see to things."

Andy found himself in a whirl of motion and excitement. When he had left the island where he had sacrificed his time and risked his chances of winning the race, he had discovered that he was fourth on the programme. The *Flash* was becoming a distant speck, and the two other contesting biplanes were lagging after the leader.

Andy now set a pace to force the *Racing Star* to do its utmost. His good knowledge of detail as to the machinery and his masterly manipulation of the same soon brought results. The *Racing Star* easily passed two of the airships ahead. Then Andy ran neck-and-neck with the pilot train for several miles.

The *Flash*, however, kept up admirable speed,

but finally a wing broke or oil ran out at Wayne, and the operator descended to a relief station.

Now was Andy's chance, and he made the most of it. With those inspiriting shouts of "Hurrah! Why, it's only a boy!" and the announcement from the relay posted at Springfield by Parks that they were on hand to tank up the *Racing Star* and adjust the machinery, Andy landed at the outskirts of the city, just half the race distance covered.

It made him quite dizzy-headed to sail down along a vast sea of human beings, wild with enthusiasm at greeting the leader so far in the race.

Two men took entire charge of the *Racing Star,* with quick movements, tanking, oiling the cylinders, testing every part of it. A third man brought Andy a tray containing a cup of steaming coffee, one of beef tea, and some crackers.

"There she comes!"

"Hurrah No. 2!"

"The *Flash*!"

"And there she goes!"

"All aboard, Parks," sang out the leader of the relay gang, and with a glide and a whiz the *Racing Star* was once more up in the air.

Again the *Flash* was in the lead. Having been supplied with fuel and oil at its recent stop, the operator did not make any halt at the turning post. Andy felt fresh and ambitious, and the

Racing Star responded loyally to every touch of wheel and lever.

Fifty feet from the ground a wheel dropped from place, but Andy paid no attention to this. The train did not act as pilot on the return trip. Instead, at intervals of five miles to indicate stations, smudges were being sent aloft. Andy made a direct run for the first one of these, mapping out his route from those dimly visible on the course ahead.

At Dover Andy passed the *Flash*. For the next five miles they kept pretty well abreast.

The last smudge was about eight miles from Montrose. Andy flew past it making a circular turn as he plainly made out the aviation field in the distance. His competitor made a short cut, lost on a turn to strike the straight course and Andy overtook him.

Now it was that Andy tensioned up the splendid machine to its highest power. The white expanse of canvas and wood shivered and trembled under an unusual strain.

"In the lead!" cried Andy in delight, and his eyes sparkled through the goggles as he took a swift backward glance. The *Flash* was bungling. Its progress was a wobble and its operator was at fault in striking an even balance.

The speed of the *Racing Star* had now been increased to its utmost.

"Five minutes more, six at the most, will decide the race," breathed Andy. "I can't lose now."

The *Racing Star* was no longer a bird afloat, but an arrow. Giving to the machine a certain slant, calculating to a foot how and where he would land, Andy saw nothing, thought of nothing, but the home post.

He was conscious of a frightful bolt downwards that fairly took his breath away. There was a blur of flying fences, buildings, tents, a green expanse, a sea of human faces, a roar as a great shout went up, and the *Racing Star* met the ground on a bounce, and Andy Nelson was the winner of the great race.

Our hero did not step from the airship as eager, willing hands eased the *Racing Star* down to a stop. Cheering, excited men fairly pulled him over the drooping planes. Some one hugged him with a ringing yell of delight, and John Parks' voice sounded in his ears.

"Oh, you famous boy—Andy, my lad, it's the proudest moment of my life!"

Mr. Morse caught Andy's hand, his serious face flushed with pride.

"The *Racing Star* did it," said Andy.

"Yo' did it, chile, and yo' did it brown," chimed in Scipio, his mouth expanded in joyous delight from ear to ear.

John Parks never let go of Andy's arm as they made their way through the crowds to the main aerodrome stand. The official starter had unscrewed the speedometer and elevation gauge. He ran before them to the stand. Someone quickly chalked a legend on the big, bare blackboard. It ran:

Start of flight—10:04.
Finish—11:39.
Distance traveled—60 miles.
Maximum height—1,200 feet.
Wind velocity—12 miles from the west.
Winner—Racing Star.
Operator—Andy Nelson.

Somehow the boy aviator thrilled as he read his name at the bottom of the little legend.

"It's like a dream, Mr. Parks—just like a dream," and his voice was faint and dreamy in itself.

"Don't collapse, lad," directed the aeronaut anxiously—"the best is to come."

"It's only the reaction," said Andy. "To think I did it—me, only Andy!"

"There isn't another Andy like you in the whole world," enthusiastically declared Parks. "Yes, sir," as a man waved to him from the table on the grand stand.

"Here's the check, Parks," notified the judge.

"Well, we've won it, haven't we?" chuckled the aeronaut.

"You have, and it's ready for you. A pretty piece of paper, hey—five thousand dollars. Make it out to you?"

"I'll take it in two checks," answered Parks.

"Mr. Parks——" began Andy.

"There's only one check for the whole amount," replied the judge, "and only the name left to be filled in."

"Oh, that's the way of it, eh?" said the aeronaut. "All right, fill it in John Parks and Andy Nelson. I reckon, Andy, I can't get that twenty-five hundred dollars away from you without your signature."

He poked Andy in the ribs in jolly fun. He was all smiles and laughter as he shouted an order to Scipio to hurry home and get up the best celebration dinner he knew how. Then, Andy following him, he stepped forward to take the arm of Mr. Morse, and thus, the Japanese walking with Andy and congratulating him on his great feat, they crossed the field away from the crowds.

Some one broke over the dead line ropes and made a dash after them, yelling loudly:

"Andy, oh, Andy Nelson!"

"Hold on there!" ordered an officer, trying to head off the trespasser.

"Silas Pierce!" exclaimed Andy.

"He goes with us, officer," called out Parks. "You bet you go with us, you grand old hero!" he cried, giving the farmer boy a joyful, friendly slap on the shoulder.

"Yes, indeed," smiled Andy, catching the arm of Silas and hugging it quite, "if it hadn't been for you, there would have been no race."

"Andy," gasped Silas, "I can hardly believe it. Why you're famous."

"Am I?" smiled Andy.

"And rich."

"Rich in good friends, anyway," replied Andy.

"I hung around. When I saw you coming in on the lead, I nearly fell flat. I was so excited," declared Silas.

"I want a chance for a little talk with you, Silas," said Andy. "I want to show you how much I appreciate what you have done for me."

The merry, happy coterie crossed the field, and coming out at a gate made a short cut for the Parks camp. They had just neared it, when among the crowd thronging about the place, Andy made out a boy edging towards him.

He crowded past several persons and came up to Andy's side and caught his sleeve.

"Andy," he said in a bold but sheepish way, "you know me, don't you?"

"Why, yes, I know you," answered Andy.

He stared in mingled surprise, perplexity and distrust at the speaker.

It was Dale Billings. Hungry-faced, unkempt looking, as if he had not slept for a week, and then in a hay mow or a freight car. Andy's old-time enemy confronted him in the hour of his great triumph.

CHAPTER XXIV

A HOPEFUL CLEW

"Did you want to see me, Dale," inquired Andy.

"Yes, I do, and bad," responded Dale Billings. "See here, you've won a big race. You're rich. If it hadn't been for me and Gus Talbot, you wouldn't be."

"How is that?" inquired Andy.

"We figured along the line, didn't we? If I'd gone to work for old Talbot when I had a chance, you'd have been out and wouldn't have learned about automobiles and machinery and such, and couldn't have run an airship and won the race."

This was queer reasoning. Andy had to smile. He couldn't feel any way but pleasant and happy with the great airship prize his, however, and he said:

"Well, let that go. What are you driving at, Dale?"

"We're in hard luck, me and Gus."

"You look it," said Andy.

"We haven't got a cent, we don't dare to go back home. Gus is sick in an old shed down the tracks, and we haven't had a mouthful to eat since yesterday morning. There's no friends here we know but you. I'm just desperate. Loan me two dollars, Andy."

"Why certainly," answered Andy.

"I mean five—yes, if you'll loan us ten dollars till we get work and on our feet, we'll pay it back."

"All right," agreed Andy, "only you'll have to come up to our camp for it. You know where it is—Parks' camp."

"Yes, I know."

"I want to have a talk with you. You can depend on the money, Dale."

A thought ran through the mind of the young aviator that by kindness he might make some impression on the two outcasts. As he summed up the meanness and audacity of his recent capture, however, Andy secretly confessed that it would be a hard undertaking.

First thing of all, our hero took a bath and got himself in better shape generally. Mr. Parks and a group of his friends occupied the main sitting room. Andy had left Dale in one of the smaller apartments of the old shack. As he went thither he passed Scipio, arrayed in white apron

and natty cap and warbling a plantation ditty as he brandished knife and carver gaily.

"Getting sech a dinnah, Andy, chile," he chuckled. "Ah give you a feast you nebber forgit."

"Now then, Silas," said Andy, entering the room where he had left the farmer boy, "I've got time to shake your hand good and hearty, and glad to do it."

"And I'm glad you're not too proud to do it," replied Silas.

"You've done a big thing for me, Silas," went on Andy.

"Think so?"

"Where would the race be if you had not come along in the nick of time and set me free?"

"I was mightily surprised to see you in that queer fix," said Silas, "and I didn't know what had happened when you started on a rush for the airship."

"Well, you understand now," said Andy. "Now then, Silas, what can I do for you?"

"Do, how?"

"I want to acknowledge your usefulness in some way. There must be something you want or need."

"You mean you'd like to give me some little memento for trying to help you along?"

"That's it."

"But I'm glad to do it for nothing."

"Never mind. Come, speak out, Silas. A bicycle, a nice new watch and chain?"

"Why, see here," said Silas, after a moment's deep thought, "if it's the same to you, I'd like ten dollars and seventeen cents."

Andy smiled. "For something special?" he inquired.

"Why, yes. You see I want to go to school this winter and learn shorthand. The term is eighteen dollars, and I've only saved up seven dollars and eighty-three cents."

"I'll do better than that for you, Silas," said Andy, "and I'm glad to find you so ambitious. How is your father?"

"All right, I guess, though I haven't seen him for nigh onto a month."

"Why, how's that?"

"I've been staying at the Collins farm."

"You have?" exclaimed Andy, at once interested.

"Yes. Just came up from there yesterday. There hasn't been much doing, and won't be until the folks get their new house built. I was on their hands, though, and I'm staying around visiting relatives."

"How do you mean you was on their hands, Silas?" inquired Andy.

"Why, dad got talking with Mr. Collins after we'd got rid of the geese. There's a good academy at Wade, and Mr. Collins was going into sheep in a big way. He offered me quite a good job and the chance to go to school in the winter, and I took it."

"But Mr. Collins' house burned down," said Andy.

"What, did you hear of that?" asked Silas in surprise.

"Yes," nodded Andy.

"Well, that put things in bad shape for the family, but they are coming back soon, and in the meantime I tend to the sheep in the pasture lot. Lucky they had moved the old shed over there for storm shelter before the house and barns burned down."

"What shed?" asked Andy, with a quick start.

"The one that stood under the old elm tree. Don't you remember? Why, it was the shed you changed your clothes in."

"What!" shouted Andy, jumping to his feet in intense excitement; "that shed wasn't burned down?"

"Ain't I telling you? They moved it over to the pasture on skids two weeks before the fire."

"And it is there now?"

"Yes—but don't!"

Andy felt like making a rush at once at the great hopeful news Silas had told. The latter had grabbed his arm.

"Don't what?"

"Bolt. You're going to make a dash like you did this morning."

"No, Silas," said Andy, trying to be calm. "You can't imagine what great news you have brought me."

"I don't see how."

"We must go to the Collins farm at once, Silas, that old shed had a shelf up over the side window?"

"Remember that, do you? So do I."

"It had a lot of rubbish on it."

"I noticed that."

"Has it ever been disturbed?"

"Not that I know of. You see, Mr. Collins was arranging to have the old barracks patched up by a carpenter from Wade, when the fire came along."

"Silas," said Andy, "I threw my old clothes up on that shelf. If they are still there, I shall be able to find an old leather pocketbook in them that contains a paper upon which depends a fortune."

"You don't say so?" remarked Silas, in open-mouthed wonderment. "What queer things you happen across!"

"A gentleman named Webb is very, very anx-

ious to recover that pocketbook. I want you to go at once with me and see if the clothes are still there," and Andy briefly recited the story of the lost pocketbook and the details of his recent visit to the Collins farm.

He was consulting a railroad timetable to determine when the next train left Montrose, when Scipio rushed into the room.

"Andy, boy," he spoke quickly, "yo' told a boy to told me dat he was to be let come to see yo'?"

"What kind of a boy, Scipio?" inquired Andy.

Scipio described Dale Billings, and as he did so passed some personal comments on his "'spicious" appearance.

"Yes, that's right, Scipio," said Andy.

"Den somefin's wrong," declared the perturbed cook. "When he come, I say Mistah Nelson very much preoccupied with another gemman, and he must wait. He sot down on dat chair just outside the door hyar."

"Go on, Scipio."

"I keep my eye on him. Dat boy," announced Scipio, "remind me of mean, low-down people, I meet afore in my 'sperience. Bimeby I watch him bend towards de door. He seemed listening. Den I saw him start and draw closer to de door. Den all of a sudden he make a rush out of de place. I run to de gate. Den anoder sneaking-looking boy meet him. Dey talk fast, berry much

excited. Den dey make a run towards the railroad tracks as if dey was in a turrible hurry."

"Dale Billings and Gus Talbot!" exclaimed Andy, on fire with the intelligence imparted by his loyal, dusky friend. "Silas, they have got our secret. They are after the old leather pocketbook on the Collins farm. We must get there first!"

Andy directed Silas to wait where he was. Then he ran to the room where Mr. Parks was engaged with his friends. Appearing at the doorway he attracted the attention of the aeronaut and beckoned to him.

"What is it, Andy?" inquired Parks, coming outside. "You look excited."

"I am," admitted Andy, and then very briefly, but clearly, he explained his urgency.

"I say, you mustn't let any grass grow under your feet!" exclaimed Parks. "I reckon you've got it right—that sneaking fellow you was trying to help is off on the track of the old shed you tell about. There's the *Racing Star*—no, that won't do, but—I've got it, Andy. Wait here a minute."

John Parks flashed in among his friends and then flashed out again. Now he was accompanied by a well-dressed portly gentleman whom Andy had seen about the aviation grounds, and whom he knew to be one of the principals in getting up the race.

The aeronaut was busy talking fast and urgently to this person, who nodded to Andy and said:

"That's all right. Do you know how to run an automobile?" to Andy.

"Why, that was his old business," explained Parks.

"I'll risk anybody getting ahead of you, then. My machine is just outside the camp."

"Come on, Silas," hailed Andy as they passed on towards the gate.

Andy found a magnificent six-cylinder automobile just outside the camp. He thanked its owner heartily for allowing its use, beckoned Silas to the rear seat, and waved adieu to his employer with the cheery words:

"I'll be back inside of two hours, Mr. Parks."

"Say," bolted out Silas, holding on with both hands as they crossed the railroad tracks and struck a winding country road due north, "isn't—isn't this going pretty fast?"

"Oh, this is just starting up," declared Andy.

"I never rode in one of these before," said Silas. "Those sneaks won't get much ahead of this, I'm thinking."

Andy thought this, too. There was not the least doubt in his mind that Dale Billings and Gus Talbot were already on the trail of the old leather pocketbook. All they could do, however, was to

steal their way on some slow freight train. Still, they might induce someone to go for them or with them by faster travel. They might get an automobile, even if they had to steal one. Andy felt that it was pretty hopeless trying to make Dale or Gus respectable. He had intended, in the liberality of his heart, to put them on their feet. Here, the first thing, Dale was acting the part of a sneak and a thief.

It felt good to Andy to get back to his old business once more. Once out on a clear, level road, he made the machine fairly hum. Various ejaculations back of him told that his unexperienced passenger was having spasms. In considerably less than an hour the machine reached Wade. They were soon at the site of the Collins farmhouse.

"There's the old shed, see?" spoke Silas, as Andy directed the machine across the fields.

"Yes, I see," said Andy, "and it's a sight for sore eyes."

He halted the machine and jumped out as they reached the fence of a pasture lot containing several flocks of sheep. In one corner of it stood the old shed. Silas was worked up to quite as high a pitch of suspense and expectation as Andy himself.

"There's the shelf!" he cried, as Andy passed through the doorway.

"Yes, but—my old clothes are not here."

"Oh, don't say that!" almost choked out Silas.

"It is true," said Andy, getting down from the keg he was standing on. "Here's a lot of old truck, wagon hardware and hoops and a grindstone, but the clothes are gone."

Silas uttered a dismal groan.

"Oh, I'm a hoodoo!" he declared, banging his head first on one side and then on the other. "Here I've made you all this trouble, all for nothing. But, say," added the farmer eagerly, "some one must have taken those clothes. We may trace them down. And say, some one has been in this shed since I left it yesterday."

"Why do you think so?"

"Someone has slept here. See, the floor is covered with straw. Some tramp, I suppose. It rained last night, and he came in here for shelter. Oh, whoop! whoopee!"

At first Andy thought his companion had taken leave of his senses. With a Comanche-like yell Silas had made a spring. Then a method to his apparent madness was disclosed.

Andy saw him pull a wadded mass out of a hole formerly used to admit a stove pipe. Andy gasped with gladness and hope.

"My clothes," he said, "sure enough!"

"Don't you see?" said the jubilant Silas, dancing

a joyful hornpipe. "It rained. The tramp who stayed here stuffed up the hole to shut out the rain. Say, sure your clothes?"

"Yes," said Andy, searching them.

"And the pocketbook?"

"Here it is," cried our hero in a strained tone that trembled. "Yes, the pocketbook is here all right."

"Hurrah!" yelled Silas Pierce at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XXV

GOOD-BY TO AIRSHIP ANDY

"A VISITOR for yo', Marse Andy," announced Scipio.

"It's only me," said Mr. Chase, stepping into the sitting room of the aerodrome at the Parks' camp.

"Well, no one is more welcome, Mr. Chase," declared Andy heartily. "Come in, sit down, and make yourself at home."

"Not till I ask a certain question," dissented the grizzled lockup-keeper of Princeville.

"Fire away," smiled Andy. "What's the question?"

"Can you get me a job?"

"Right off, and a good one," responded Andy promptly. "My employer, Mr. Parks, is going into the airship line as a regular professional, and I don't know a better all-round handy man I would recommend sooner than you."

"All right," said Chase, with a sigh of relief,

dropping into a chair and placing a bulging, ancient carpet bag on the floor. "I'm done with lockups."

"Is that so, Mr. Chase?"

"It is, and with that conscienceless old grafter, Talbot. You know I told you I was waiting for something when I last saw you."

"Yes," nodded Andy.

"It was Wandering Dick."

"So you told me."

"I sent that tramp after him. He found him. I got from Dick what I wanted, paid for it, resigned my position, and now I am here."

"Quick work."

"And here's what I got from Wandering Dick." Chase extended to Andy a neatly folded paper.

"And what is this, Mr. Chase?" asked Andy.

"A confession and affidavit."

"How does that interest me?"

"Read and see."

Andy's face grew interested and then startled as he perused the sheet of paper. It was a legal document attested to by Wandering Dick before a regular justice of the peace at Princeville.

In his affidavit the tramp stated that on the night that the barn of Farmer Jones burned down, he was in its hay mow. He saw distinctly the two boys who set the fire—Gus Talbot and Dale Billings. He got out of the way for fear of being

charged with the crime, sought later shelter at the jail, and told Chase about it.

The latter was so dependent upon Talbot and in dread of the garage keeper, who held his position at his mercy, that he made no move to right Andy with the public until the latter was arrested.

"You have done nobly, Mr. Chase," said Andy with deep gratitude, "and where is your bill of expenses to settle?"

"Settle nothing!" flared out Chase stormily. "You ever mention it again and I'll get out of here bag and baggage, double quick."

"Well, well," answered Andy, "we'll try to find some way to make it up to you."

Two days later Andy learned that the attention of Seth Talbot had been called to the affidavit. Runaway Gus Talbot and Dale Billings had returned to Princeville. In some way the garage keeper settled with Farmer Jones, hushed up the matter, and sent his graceless son on a sea voyage. The charge against Andy was, of course, dismissed.

Andy went to visit Duske in the town hospital. His accomplice, Tyrrell, had been driven out of the aviation camp and threatened with a coat of tar and feathers if he ever returned. The rest of Duske's party disappeared, and creditors seized what little property he had.

Duske would never drive a balloon or airship

again. One arm and one foot were broken, and he had sustained other severe injuries. Andy found him a dispirited, wretched man.

He had an object in visiting the crippled aeronaut. He began by telling Duske that deeply as he tried to wrong Parks, the latter had ordered and paid for the best care during his stay in the hospital.

"I am circulating a subscription paper among the aviators," added Andy. "We expect to raise a thousand dollars for you to go to some quiet town and buy some small business that will give you a living."

No person could resist the kindliness of Andy under the circumstances. Duske broke down completely. He was as sincere and penitent as a man of his rough mould of mind could be.

"I don't deserve it, I've been a bad man," he declared, with tears in his eyes. "What can I do for you for all your kindness to me?"

"You can do something, Mr. Duske," said Andy. "There is a man named Morse. Do you know him?"

"Why, yes, I do," replied Duske, with a great start. "Do you?"

"I happen to."

"What has he got to do with you and me?"

"Just this," said Andy, "you have treated him

badly. He is my friend. You had a hold on him. What was it?"

"A forgery he never committed."

"Are you willing to prove that, and clear him?"

"Yes, indeed. I've done enough wickedness in the world."

"Then clear his name of an unjust charge, so he can stand before the public the good, noble man he is."

"I will," declared Duske earnestly, and he did.

One week after the airship race Mr. Webb, to whom Andy had sent the old leather pocketbook by registered mail the day he recovered it, came down to the Parks camp.

"I have been too busy to come before," he explained to Andy. "That document in the old leather pocketbook took up my time. I tell you, Nelson, it has brought brightness and comfort to two orphan children in a grand way."

"I am very glad," said Andy.

"I got back the two hundred dollars you left at the bank in Princeville," continued Mr. Webb. "I have added something to it, and my attorneys have directed me to pay you what they intended to give the finder of the pocketbook—five hundred dollars."

Andy made some demur at the largeness of the amount, but Mr. Webb was persistent, declared

he was simply acting as agent for the lawyers, and Andy had to take the money.

"As to myself," observed the gentleman, "I want to say what you must already know, Nelson—I am greatly interested in you. I wish you could suggest some way in which my means can benefit you."

"So do I," broke in John Parks. "The lad is a genius in the aviation line, and I want him to keep on at it."

"Don't I intend to?" challenged Andy.

"Not when you say you are going to leave me next month," declared the aeronaut.

"Yes, but why?" said Andy. "I'll leave it to Mr. Webb here if I have not decided in a sensible, practical way."

"What is it, Nelson?" inquired Mr. Webb.

"Why, I have over two thousand five hundred dollars in the bank. I want to put one thousand of it aside for my half brother, when he turns up. He was good and kind to me in the old days, and I must not forget it. Then I want to go through college and learn something so I may be of some use in the world."

"An excellent idea," commended Mr. Webb.

"Yes," growled Parks, but playfully, "and spoil a good aviator!"

"Not at all," declared Andy quickly. "I love the airship business, Mr. Parks, but I want to

learn every branch of the science that covers it. It looks as if airships are to be the coming vehicles of travel, you say, Mr. Parks. If that is so, everybody will be flying in time, and the professional aviator will be just a common, everyday person."

"Well, I suppose that's so," admitted Parks.

"Then, the wise man will be the one who knows how to build the airship. Why, I'll go through college, come out with my head chock full of new ideas, and Mr. Webb and you and I will get up the World's Airship Construction Co."

"That's a pretty grand scheme, Nelson," said Mr. Webb.

"Mayn't it become a true one?"

"Yes, it may," said John Parks, "but I'll always think most of you just as you are—Airship Andy."

THE END

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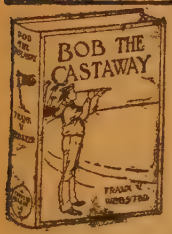

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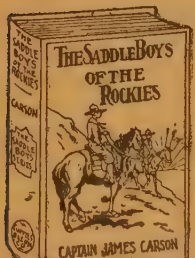

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CUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers, NEW YORK

S0-CPS-594